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ABSTRACT

Common myths of the Reconstruction Era perpetuated by textbooks are examined and positive information to counter these myths is provided. The presentation of Reconstruction in 12 secondary level U.S. history textbooks, published between 1979 and 1982, is analyzed. The myths that are examined include the following: blacks were helpless and confused during Reconstruction, the freedpeople drifted aimlessly about the South, the land redistribution issue was an unfounded notion, freed blacks lacked the skills needed to build independent lives, white men played the central role in post-war social change, blacks were not smart, no white violence was used to overturn Reconstruction's gains, Southern white men were not very successful lawmakers, Northern whites who participated in the Reconstruction governments were greedy adventurers and Reconstruction governments were often corrupt. Also included are a bibliography of readings, a chronology of events of the Reconstruction Era, a list of textbooks used in the study, and statistics concerning blacks in our society. (RM)

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RECONSTRUCTION: The Promise and Betrayal of Democracy

A Filmstrip and Teachers' Guide (4th-9th grades), with classroom activities and resources designed to accompany this booklet, are available from:
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Note on Terminology:

When referring to people of African descent in the United States, this booklet uses the terms "African Americans," "Black people" and "Blacks." When referring to people of European descent in the United States, the terms "European Americans," "white people" and "whites" are used. "Black" is spelled with an upper-case "B" when it refers to a specific group of U.S. citizens—African Americans—most of whom, because of the nature of the slave system, are unable to identify the particular African cultures or nationalities from which they are descended. "White" is spelled with a lower-case "w" when it refers to people of European descent as a whole. When referring to a specific group of white U.S. citizens, e.g., Irish Americans, those names are capitalized.

WHY STUDY RECONSTRUCTION?

A study of history reveals "unmistakable and alarming parallels between the 1880s and the 1980s," testified Arthur Fleming, chair of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, to a Congressional Committee in 1981. "We cannot but wonder whether the Nation has started down a path of civil rights retrenchment similar to that of the post-Reconstruction period."

There are, indeed, striking "parallels." These parallels exist in the gains for democracy achieved in the South during the Reconstruction period following the Civil War, and the gains for democracy achieved during the Civil Rights era of the late 1950's and 1960's. During the Civil Rights era—often called "the second Reconstruction"—Black people won increased voting rights; an end to legal segregation of schools, transportation, and public accommodations; plus other democratic rights. Most of these rights had been previously won during Reconstruction (1865-1877). They were lost in the post-Reconstruction period. During both the Reconstruction and Civil Rights periods, the United States moved closer to becoming a nation in which the exercise of rights and attainment of justice did not depend on the color of one's skin. Both periods witnessed an expansion of democracy, as political power became more broadly shared.

Reconstruction lasted barely a decade, but in that brief and imperfect time, the United States came closer to realizing the principles of the Declaration of Independence than ever before. Black communities in the South gained a significant (though still not proportionate) share of political power. Southern state government enacted constitutions guaranteeing civil liberties, universal male suffrage, and other democratic rights. They introduced free, compulsory public education and undertook efforts to further social justice and democracy.

The great promise of Reconstruction was betrayed by powerful white interests in the North as well as in the South. Those who had gained most from slavery wanted to maintain the system of economic, political and social domination of whites over Blacks. And they were willing to resort to massive fraud and violence to do so.

The Civil War had led to the abolition of slavery and, for a time, the displacement of white supremacy from political power in most Southern states. However, with the overthrow of the multi-racial Reconstruction governments, white supremacist control of government returned. Disfranchisement, Jim Crow segregation, lynching, and a system of peonage called sharecropping became the means of maintaining white domination. The failure of the post-Civil War generation to end institutionalized white supremacy left the attainment of democracy to future generations.

A study of Reconstruction can teach us that racial justice and political equity are not natural outgrowths of this nation's principles, but are won through struggle. A study of Reconstruction gives us perspective on the achievements and shortcomings of contemporary efforts to create a more just, nonracist society. This historical understanding can better prepare us to defend and build upon these achievements and to reverse the "civil rights retrenchment" of which Arthur Fleming spoke. The lessons of Reconstruction offer us considerable insight that can strengthen our efforts to insure that the following assessment of the post-Reconstruction Presidency of Rutherford B. Hayes will not be applicable to the present: "White supremacy was more securely entrenched . . . when he left the White House than it had been when he entered it."*

RACISM PERSISTS TODAY

The Civil Rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's challenged white control of the country's political and social institutions in a way that had not occurred since Reconstruction. Once again, years of struggle and much blood were required to outlaw racial segregation. Yet, despite all the undeniable progress achieved since then, economic, political, educational, media, and other social institutions remain firmly under white control. The "white backlash" of the late 60's and the "benign neglect" of the 70's evolved into the reversal of federal civil rights enforcement and slashing of social service programs in the 1980's.

Various social and economic indicators demonstrate the many continuing disparities between Blacks and whites (see statistics on inside back cover). Numerous reports from governmental and private agencies document the continuing impact of racial discrimination. For example, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reported in November, 1982, that persistent discrimination was the main reason that Blacks had much higher rates of unemployment than whites (20.2 percent compared to 9.3 percent in October of that year). Rabbi Murray Saltzman, a member of the Commission, stated that, "The various rationalizations to explain disparities in unemployment, other than discrimination, appear not to hold water. We are left with the damning reality of discrimination as the prime factor for the gap."**

Yet many whites explain such racial disparities by "blaming the victim." That is, placing responsibility for their condition on Black people themselves. This practice is promoted by historic racist characterizations of Black people prevalent in U.S. culture. Today, victim-blaming also grows out of the widely held belief that individual initiative and hard work are the primary factors in determining social and economic status in the U.S., with little recognition of the continuing existence and impact of racial discrimination. Thus, a 1982 *Washington Post*/ABC News poll found that at least

* *The Betrayal of the Negro*, Rayford W. Logan. New York: Collier Books, 1976, p. 45.

** *New York Times*, November 24, 1982.

65 percent of whites questioned said Blacks in their area were generally not discriminated against in education, housing or employment. Rather, 59 percent of whites blamed Black people for having worse jobs, income and housing than whites, asserting that "most Blacks don't have the motivation or will power to pull themselves out of poverty."

TEACHING ABOUT RACISM

Researchers studying the racial prejudice of adolescents found that when young people see racial disparities between groups, they seek an explanation. Too often, that explanation is a victim-blaming one. The researchers concluded that the single most important tool in lessening adolescent prejudice is to provide young people with "explanations that are sensitive to the historical circumstances which gave rise to group differences and that recognize the cultural, social and psychological forces which sustain them. . . . such reasoning makes it clear that the group itself is not at fault.†

Unfortunately, young people are not given "explanations" about the "historical circumstances" of racism. The ways in which white domination helped to shape the conditions of Black people, and so much else in U.S. history, are rarely presented in schools. For example, a study of children's books about the 1776 U.S. revolution found that the books ignore the contradictions inherent in a slave-owning society that proclaimed itself based on principles of equality, liberty and justice for all.‡

There are some groups and individuals who believe that teaching about racism in U.S. history is "anti-American." Such groups wield considerable influence today on the adoption (and thereby in the publication) of school textbooks. They insist that school books ignore discrimination, poverty and racism, and that they be silent about the history of social protest for equality and justice. They want children to think that the U.S. has no problems of racial injustice today.

To study the Reconstruction period honestly, we must confront the racism and white supremacy that have been an integral part of U.S. history. Yet the lessons of that period do not negate the principles upon which this nation is based. Rather, they reaffirm both the principles and the intense striving for freedom and justice that all people share. Such study focuses on the central theme of our history—the on-going struggle to create a nation in which freedom and democracy will truly be for all. Our future as a people and our potential as a nation can only be enhanced by an understanding of the period in which the United States came so close to realizing its promise.

†*Adolescent Prejudice*, Charles Y. Glock et al. New York: Harper and Row, 1975, p. 167.

‡"The American Revolution in Children's Books: Issues of Racism and Classism," Joel Taxel, in *Interracial Books for Children Bulletin*, Vol. 12, No. 7 & 8, pp. 3-9.

RECONSTRUCTION HISTORY AND HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

Instead of celebrating Reconstruction as a giant stride forward for U.S. democracy and freedom, textbooks and school curricula have taken a very different approach. Before examining how they do so, it is instructive to review how this approach developed.

Historical scholarship has given its sanction to the propaganda of the victorious side in the Reconstruction war.

Richard N. Current, "Carpetbaggers Reconsidered," *Reconstruction in the South*, p. 105

By 1910, almost 30 years after Reconstruction had been destroyed, its main interpretation in textbooks had become that of "The Tragic Era." Such a description justified the re-establishment of white political domination and the destruction of the most democratic governments the South had experienced. It minimized the widespread terrorist violence used against African Americans and many whites. And it was a logical outcome of the political climate of the turn of the century.

The period was the lowest point for African Americans since slavery. White supremacy permeated U.S. society. Lynchings were commonplace. Gross stereotypes and demeaning caricatures used to depict Black people in newspapers, magazines and advertisements had mushroomed since the 1870's. After a host of earlier decisions reducing federal protection for civil rights, the U.S. Supreme Court, in the 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision, gave its seal of approval to racial segregation and inequality as acceptable under the U.S. Constitution.

Racist "scientific" theories had widespread acceptance among white academicians, writers, journalists and government officials. These theories were used to justify the ever more rigid color lines being established at home and abroad.

The "white man's burden" and "little brown brother" colonialist mentality of the time went hand-in-hand with the U.S. takeover of Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Philippines and Hawaii in 1896 and soon thereafter, of the Panama Canal area. This mentality was also used to justify Europe's colonial division of Africa in the 1880's and the takeover of much of the rest of the world by the early 1900's.

W.E.B. DuBois, the scholar and Black leader, wrote in 1903 that, "The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line, the relation of the darker to the lighter races. . . in Africa and Asia, in America and the islands of the sea."

MYTHOLOGY OF RECONSTRUCTION

When the first epic motion picture—"Birth of a Nation"—blazoned across the early movie screens in 1915, the "tragedy" of Reconstruction and the "glorious" role of the Ku Klux Klan in "saving white civilization" was impressed upon the minds of millions. President Woodrow Wilson (who two years earlier had segregated federal employee lunch rooms and washrooms in Washington, D.C.) arranged a screening for his Cabinet in the East Room of the White House and said the movie was "like writing history with lightning, and my only regret is that it is all so terribly true." The next evening the movie was shown to the Supreme Court and members of Congress. Chief Justice Edward White, an ex-Confederate and former Klansman, commented that he was pleased that "the true story of that uprising of outraged manhood" was finally being made known to the nation.

Birth of a Nation *depicts Klansmen riding to the rescue of the white South, driving out "corrupt" and "rowdy" Black Union soldiers. This first epic motion picture was seen by millions.*

White supremacist interpretations of Reconstruction predominated among white historians. John W. Burgess, Professor of History at Columbia University, called Reconstruction "the most soul-sickening spectacle that Americans had ever been called upon to behold." Burgess believed "it is the white man's mission, his duty and his right to hold the reins of political power in his own hands for the civilization of the world and the welfare of mankind." One of the most influential white historians, William A. Dunning (also of Columbia), declared of Reconstruction that, "All the forces that made for civilization were dominated by a mass of barbarous freedmen." Woodrow Wilson, in his pre-Presidential profession of historian, described Black people at the end of slavery as "a host of dusky children untimely put out of school." He stated that the "instinct of self-preservation" forced Southern whites "to rid themselves by fair means or foul of the intolerable burden of governments sustained by the votes of ignorant negroes. . ."

MYTHOLOGY IN TEXTBOOKS

By 1910 the white supremacist version of Reconstruction prevailed in U.S. school textbooks. Henry William Elson's *History of the United States of America*, published in 1910 by Macmillan, is an example.

> Congressional reconstruction was. . . merciless; a study of it enlists our sympathies with the South. . . . The governments set up during those days were scandalous beyond precedent. The state treasuries were plundered and bonds were issued increasing the state debts to an alarming degree. . . . The increase indicated no public improvements —only theft. . .
>
> The carpetbag governments disappeared with the withdrawal of the troops, and the state governments immediately passed again into the hands of the white men. And this was most natural. Nothing else could possibly have been expected. The white race had labored for centuries to attain self-government. . . . Could it be that the government of these great communities should be turned over to a landless, penniless, homeless, illiterate race that knew not the first principles of self government? Such a spectacle is unknown in the world's history. Where the brains and property are on one side and most of the ignorance and poverty on the other, the former will rule at any cost. . . . The rule of the white man is essential to southern progress. What, then, of the negro in the future? He can become equal to the white man in the government of the South only when he makes himself an equal force in civilization. And perhaps this may never be, for Nature has done more for pale-faced brother than for him. What, then, of the negro in the future? The best thing remains to be told, namely: the negro is quite safe and his happiness quite secure under the white man's government (pp. 799-802).

Thus were millions of U.S. school children taught about the effort to build democracy after the Civil War.

In 1935, W.E.B. DuBois published his ground-breaking study, *Black Reconstruction in America*, challenging the white supremacist interpretation. The research of other historians brought further information to light on the gains of the period. This new scholarship came to be known as the "revisionist" school of Reconstruction historians. Yet, the white supremacist interpretation of Reconstruction dominated textbooks into the 1960's. An analysis of Reconstruction in U.S. history textbooks by Mark M. Krug appeared in *The Journal of Negro History* in April, 1961. Krug wrote that "the period of Reconstruction presents, perhaps, the greatest challenge to textbook writers (p. 133)."

> In view of the pronounced difference of approach and conclusion between the traditional and revisionist schools of Reconstruction historians, it is of interest to note the similarity of approach and content in the study of Reconstruction as presented in the popular high school texts. Most textbook writers tend to overlook the research of the revisionist school accumulated during the last twenty years

and base their account of Reconstruction primarily on the findings of the Burgess-Dunning-Randall and Fleming schools (p.135).

Krug noted, almost in passing, that "recent studies have suggested that the central issue of Reconstruction was not the imposition of the Republican governments, not their graft and inefficiency but the attempt to give the Negroes political equality (p. 147)." This seemingly naive observation, made in 1961, reflects the strength of the white supremacist interpretation of Reconstruction before the Civil Rights Movement and the expansion of Black history research rocked the foundations and assumptions of the white-dominated field of history.

In 1965, William Pierce Randel observed in *The Ku Klux Klan: A Century of Infamy*, that "Reconstruction history is still being taught in the nation's schools in a way that justifies white supremacy and the Klan as its most effective agent." He noted that, despite a great deal of scholarly research demonstrating a very different reality, "most of our school history textbooks maintain the interpretation established early in this century by authors clearly partial to Southern tradition and hostile to the Negro hope of attaining full equality (p. xxi)."

Reconstruction was one of the most misunderstood periods of U.S. history according to a 1975 *New York Times*/Educational Testing Service survey of first year college students' understanding of U.S. history (*New York Times*, May 2, 3 & 4, 1976). Thirty-six percent of the students, including a disproportionate percentage of higher achievers, characterized the period as an era of "unparalleled corruption among the entrenched carpetbagger governors and their allies in the black dominated legislatures in the defeated states." Another 15 percent erroneously believed Reconstruction led "to an effective program of land redistribution that gave to large numbers of newly freed slaves 'forty acres and a mule.'" Only 32 percent described it as "leading to significant, but only partially implemented, constitutional changes on the state level in the South and also on the national level."

Although contemporary texts describe Reconstruction more positively than texts of the 1960's and before, on the whole they offer a negative estimate of the period. Current texts present little about the pivotal role played by African Americans during Reconstruction, about the significance of the attempt to replace whites-only rule with multi-racial democracy, or about the tragic national implications of the brutal resubjugation of Black citizens. A more detailed examination of the history of Reconstruction and its presentation in current history texts follows.

TEXTBOOKS TODAY

The presentation of Reconstruction in twelve U.S. history textbooks published between 1979 and 1982 was analyzed for this study (see p. 38 for listing of texts. A number of general observations can be drawn from this analysis.

Chief among these observations is the almost complete exclusion of the voices and perspectives of African Americans of the period about the issues confronting them and the country with the end of the war and the abolition of slavery. African Americans are silent spectators of Reconstruction, discussed as mute objects of white action. "Both the North and the South had to decide what to do about the southern Blacks *(The Free and the Brave*, p. 451)." Lerone Bennett, Jr., on the other hand, observes that the basic motif of Reconstruction was "the triangular contest between Northern-born and Southern-born whites who wanted to use black people for their own interest, and the desperate attempt of black people to use themselves for their own interests (*Black Power U.S.A.*, p. 245)." In contemporary textbooks, unfortunately, Black perspectives, concerns, demands, actions, hopes and dreams are all but ignored.

Black people's reactions to freedom rarely find expression in textbooks. On the other hand, the post-war despair and loss of "southerners" (one need not ask which color) is duly noted, particularly in regard to the loss of "their slaves." If Black people's desire for land *is* mentioned, it is dismissed as a "false hope" or as a rumor put in their heads by Thaddeus Stevens. "Many freed slaves accepted the rumor as truth," is about as close as students will get in a current U.S. history textbook to Black people's thoughts on the question of land or anything else. W.E.B. DuBois' 1930's observation is still applicable to U.S. history texts today. "The chief witness in Reconstruction, the emancipated slave . . . has been . . . nearly always neglected. The Negro is refused a hearing . . . ."

A second observation is the failure of the texts to present Reconstruction as a singular opportunity to create a more democratic society, actualizing the principles upon which the texts proclaim the United States is based. It is a rare textbook which mentions the principles embodied in the Declaration of Independence while explaining the Congressional Reconstruction program; "the cause of the Radicals was strong because they appealed to the principles of the Declaration of Independence: that people had a natural right to equality and that government must rest on the consent of the governed *(History of a Free People*, p. 368)." Students get little sense that Reconstruction had the potential of being a moment in history when the United States "might have moved to overcome its own past, respond creatively to its former slaves, and begun the struggle to create an authentically new future, starting in the South (Harding, *There Is a River*, p. 309)."

Concurrent with the failure of texts to present Reconstruction's potential, is their tendency to besmirch public officials who worked to broaden democracy and provide more equitable treatment of citizens of African descent, poor whites and, to a degree, all women. A textbook can state that, in 1865, "southern legislatures passed special laws known as 'Black Codes' to keep [Blacks] under control (*History of a Free People*, p. 367)," without scrutinizing the qualifications, experience, education, motivations, self-interest, or honesty of the white men who enacted such anti-democratic and racist legislation. Textbooks' critical eye is applied only to political leaders who sought to end white domination and affirm democracy and equality. White "Radicals" in Congress, Southern Black politicians, "Carpetbaggers," and "Scalawags" all emerge with a distinctly negative cast.

Texts provide scarce information on efforts to provide females with the same rights and privileges accorded male citizens. The issues of woman's rights—to vote, for equal pay for equal work, for control of their property, etc.—were discussed and struggled over during the period, and need to be reported. A textbook that discusses the 14th and 15th Amendments without reference to their impact on the struggle for woman's suffrage, withholds important historical information. Worse still is a text which incorrectly claims that the 15th Amendment failed to assure the right to vote for all citizens—male and female—by "common consent (*Let Freedom Ring*, p. 351)."

The word "racism" does not appear in the Reconstruction sections of the textbooks examined. Little effort is made to explain the nature of white racism in U.S. society. A few texts state that, with the end of Reconstruction, "white supremacy" was re-established. Yet the benefits of a white supremacist system to those segments of society that again dominated the economic and political structures of the South are not discussed.

Reconstruction was a time of profoundly conflicting views —among whites as well as between whites and Blacks— concerning the nature of post-war society. The goal of a multi-racial democracy, held by Blacks and some whites, lost out to the desire of many whites to maintain white supremacy. Harding observes that the "white community . . . tended to focus largely on the politics and mechanics of putting the rent republic back together again. . . . whites were looking for ways to fit the black population into their own plans for America's continued development as a white man's country (*The Other American Revolution*, pp. 71-72)." U.S. history textbooks in the 1980's tend to explain Reconstruction from that same perspective.

Restoring the Southern states to the Union and reviving the Southern economy are presented as *the* major problems of the Reconstruction era. The rights of Black people to vote, enjoy political representation, build independent lives, and share in the land and wealth created by their forced labor are given little attention. These rights are not described as legitimate expectations for Black citizens.

Textbooks mention political, economic, social and human issues, but only as disconnected factors. One text identifies the problems of the post-war period as "the stubborn political and constitutional problems of bringing the Southern states back into the Union . . . the grave economic problems of rebuilding devastated southern industries . . . the continuing social problem of bringing black Americans into the mainstream of national life (*Rise of the American Nation*, p. 386)." Another text identifies the three main problems as "a human one. What were the 4 million newly freed blacks in the South to do? . . . political. What was to happen to the Southern states? . . . constitutional. Who had a right to determine how the Confederate states would be readmitted to the Union (*The Americans*, p. 311)?" All these were, assuredly, real problems. Yet the questions facing the country as to the status of African Americans were more than just "human" and "social." They involved inherent "economic," "political," and "constitutional" issues as well.

The challenges posed by four million African Americans for the rights, liberties and freedoms due them were political and constitutional in nature. So were armed insurrections by whites against legally constituted state governments. So was white terrorism directed at citizens exercising the franchise. Similarly, the struggle of the newly freed slave labor force for some of the land earned by lifetimes of forced labor was as much an economic issue as was "rebuilding devastated southern industries."

By segmenting the problems facing society, texts are able to conclude with seemingly positive results. "Stubborn political and constitutional problems" are resolved once the Southern states are restored to the Union and "white southerners regain control of *their* state governments (*Rise of the American Nation*, p. 397, emphasis added)." "Grave economic problems" are overcome as the "New South advances in agriculture, industry and education," with agricultural advances stimulated by "an abundance of cheap labor (*Rise of the American Nation*, pp. 401 and 403 respectively)."

Unlike the resolution of "stubborn" political and "grave" economic problems, the "continuing social problem of bringing black Americans into the mainstream of national life" just seems to continue. Little or no information is provided about the political, economic and social advancements of Black people during Reconstruction. Rather, they are depicted as without skills, illiterate and in need of white benevolence. Finally, students are told that, "Many northerners began to say that perhaps the freed slaves *did* need the supervision of white southern leaders. Perhaps it would be better, they now said, to let southerners work out their own problems of government and race relations (*Rise of the American Nation*, p. 401)."

Unfortunately, the "problems of government and race relations" are little defined or discussed. An issue such as the right of all people to political representation, earlier proclaimed by the texts as the underlying principle of U.S. democracy, simply is not applied to African Americans. Issues

of power, and the revolutionary struggle over an equitable share of political power, are avoided. This, one must remember, is a discussion devoted to "Restoring the South to the Union." The problem of "government and race relations" is subsumed, indeed submerged, under that focus as just a "continuing social problem."

One cannot study reconstruction without first frankly facing the facts of universal lying, of deliberate and unbounded attempts to prove a case and win a dispute and preserve economic mastery and political domination by besmirching the character, motives, and common sense, of every single person who dared disagree with the dominant philosophy of the white South.

W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction*, p. 347

For the most part, the status of citizens of African descent is presented as a problem of concern only to Blacks. After casually explaining the disfranchisement of Black men and the establishment of Jim Crow segregation, a textbook calls the Supreme Court's 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* affirmation of segregation "a serious blow to the efforts of Black Americans to improve their lives *(Rise of the American Nation*, p. 406)." There is no suggestion that constitutional sanction by the nation's highest court of a political, economic and social system of Black subjugation and white domination represented "a serious blow" to the U.S. as a whole, and specifically to the principles and ideals upon which the texts claim the country is based. Thus, a chapter on "Restoring the South to the Union" concludes, "In 1900 [with] the tragic exception of the blacks, who were desperately struggling to find a place for themselves in the New South, the southern states were making great strides forward *(Rise of the American Nation*, p. 408)." No text even suggests that the "tragic exception" can be understood from a diametrically different perspective:

> A totalitarian system came into being in the heart of America, and America, in sanctioning that system, became less than a democracy . . . . this solid bloc of reaction changed the whole tone and tenor of American life. Racism enveloped the whole country . . . (Bennett, *Black Power U.S.A.*, p. 387).

Survey texts cannot be expected to provide extensive analysis of any one historical period. However, texts have considerable leeway in defining issues and discussing problems from many perspectives. The manner in which current texts discuss Reconstruction represents a whitewash of the fundamental contradiction between white supremacy and democracy in the United States. The following sections examine contemporary textbook presentations, showing how they distort the period, and provide some of the information and perspectives they omit.

DISPELLING TEXTBOOK MYTHS

African Americans Define Freedom

Immediately after the war many blacks, delighted to be free, nevertheless did not know what to do. There were no jobs; the old plantation life was gone. Many of them drifted from place to place around the South seeking work. Others traveled about in the hope of finding relatives from whom they had been separated during slavery days. Seeing this great mass of free black men and women wandering around infuriated Southern whites. So they passed black codes, which put blacks in an inferior position.

The Americans (1982), p. 314

Many were wandering through the countryside. They did not know where to go or what to do. It was wonderful to be free. But nothing had been done to prepare them for the problems and responsibilities of this new way of life.

America: Its People and Values (1979), p. 476

. . . when they were finally set free, most black people were without homes or work. The former slaves would need help to succeed as free people.

The Free and the Brave (1980), p. 452

Freed slaves found that some of their biggest problems were still ahead of them. Thousands wandered about homeless and hungry. Many were confused. Some thought the "day of jubilee" had come. They had been told that the government was going to give them "forty acres and a mule." Some ex-slaves even paid money to fast-talking, phony salesmen for red, white, and blue markers to put at the corners of the land they were to get.

America's Heritage (1982), p. 306

Textbooks generally ignore the active and courageous role of African Americans in propelling themselves—and the nation—toward greater freedom and democracy during Reconstruction. Rather, texts imply that Blacks were helpless and confused, their status depending solely on the struggle between Congress, the President and Southern whites.

At war's end, Blacks represented 10 to 13 percent of Union forces. They had struggled long and hard for the right to join the Union armies. In May, 1861, Frederick Douglass wrote, "Let the slaves and free colored people be called into service and formed into a liberating army, to march into the South and raise the banner of emancipation among the slaves." It was not until 1863, however, that Blacks were mustered into the Union Army. Their participation was critical to the Union victory. During the war, 178,895 Blacks

As Reconstruction unfolded, African Americans gathered in large conventions and small groups to discuss, plan and organize for new lives as free and equal citizens.

were inducted, and about 3,000 were killed in battle, while 26,000 died from disease.

After the war, white soldiers were mustered out of service first, leaving 120,000 Black soldiers in the Southern occupation force. Vincent Harding writes that these Black soldiers "considered themselves at once representatives of the conquering Union government, protectors of their ancestral community, and guarantors of their people's dreams (*There Is a River*, p. 302)." These soldiers were an important source of encouragement for freedpeople to insist on rights, to seek better opportunities, and to hold off signing disadvantageous labor contracts in expectation of land redistribution.

In the first year after the war, thousands of Black people gathered (often under the threat of armed white attack) in meetings and conventions across the South. They proclaimed, petitioned, and demanded their freedom and rights. Whether in a convention of thousands, or in individual assertions of the right to carry arms, ride a horse or travel freely, Black people were actively freeing themselves and "forcing . . . the issue of their role in America's future onto the center of the national stage (Harding, *There Is a River*, p. 284)." "We know our rights," an 1867 Black convention in Mobile declared to the people of Alabama, "and knowing, dare to maintain them."

And dare they did. In 1868, when a bill providing for equal accommodations on street cars and railroads was before the Alabama legislature, hundreds of Blacks, and some whites, boarded streetcars in Mobile to protest racial discrimination. In 1871, Blacks in Louisville, Kentucky, attracted national attention with a "ride-in" campaign, sitting in the "white" section of horse-drawn streetcars. Although white mobs overturned streetcars and smashed windows, the demonstrations continued until the streetcar company integrated all seating. Ride-ins, sit-ins, and walk-ins also occurred in New Orleans, Charleston and Northern cities.

Strikes in which Black women played crucial roles were staged in rice and cotton fields. In 1866, Black washerwomen in Jackson, Mississippi, organized to charge "a uniform rate for our labor." Organizing by Black Mississippi sharecroppers for improved conditions led planters to threaten their replacement with Chinese laborers in 1870. (This marked the beginning of Mississippi's Chinese American population, currently the largest in the South.) When armed Black farmers refused to relinquish to pardoned rebels the land the government had provided them during the war, Congress finally acted to allow some Blacks to secure title (see p. 14).

Harding writes that Black people's "refusal . . . to wait, this Black insistence on defining their freedom and re-creating themselves carried with it a fundamental challenge to the old order . . . . The former slaves had imaginatively seized the initiative in defining the possibilities of a transformed South (p. 310)." Blacks "were saying that freedom meant above all the right to participate in the process of creating it (*There Is a River*, p. 294)."

This pivotal role of Black people in pushing white society toward change and themselves toward freedom is critical to an understanding of the Reconstruction period. The 13th Amendment, abolishing slavery, recognized the fact that large numbers of slaves had already freed themselves. Passage of the Black Codes represented the reaction of Southern white rulers to the widespread assertion by Black people of their rights, particularly the rights to own land and to work as free labor. Northern whites' reaction against the Codes was stimulated by petitions and pleas of Southern Blacks, such as that from an 1865 convention in Charleston:

> We simply ask that we be recognized as men; that there be no obstructions placed in our way; that the same laws which govern white men shall govern black men; that we have the right of trial by jury of our peers; that schools be established for the education of colored children as well as white; and that the advantages of both colors shall, in this respect, be equal; that no impediments be put in the way of our acquiring homesteads for ourselves and our people; that, in short, we be dealt with as others are—in equity and justice.

Suffrage for Black men did not simply result from the concerns of white Republicans in Congress, as textbooks suggest, but involved active lobbying by Black people. An 1866 petition to Andrew Johnson from Blacks in North Carolina (extensively reprinted in the nation's press) pointed out:

> Some of us are soldiers and have had the privilege of fighting for our country in this war . . . we cannot understand the justice of denying the elective franchise to men who have been fighting for the country, while it is freely given to men who have just returned from four years of fighting against it.

An 1865 assembly of Black Virginians appealed to "fellow citizens":

> We have no means of legally making or enforcing contracts; we have no right to testify before the courts in any case in which a white man is one of the parties to the suit; we are taxed without representation. In short, so far as legal safeguards of our rights are concerned, we are defenseless before our enemies . . . . We ask for no expensive aid from military forces . . . . Give us suffrage and you may rely upon us to secure justice for ourselves.

Like those white Virginians who fought for political representation almost one hundred years earlier, these petitioners did not rely solely on appeals for justice. They warned other Blacks that:

> The settlement of this question is to a great extent dependent upon them. Then be up and active, and everywhere let associations be formed, having for their object the agitation, discussion and enforcement of your claims to equality before the law and equal right of suffrage. Your opponents are active; be prepared and organize to resist their efforts.

The significance of Black pressure for change is attested to by the widespread terrorism that white supremacist forces had to use to ultimately subdue them. Terrorist targets were not the passive, helpless freed slaves depicted in textbooks. Rather, they were Black leaders, from the grassroots to the statehouse, who reflected their peoples' expectations and insistence. They were those who faced a hostile white community and marauding white vigilantes to venture forth to a public convention or a secret night-time gathering to plan and organize. They were the men who dared to vote in the face of armed whites, and the women who encouraged them to do so.

They were those who successfully farmed a piece of land and, through their labor, skill and diligence, demonstrated the capacities that whites sought to deny. They were those who refused to step in a gutter so that whites could pass, who insisted on the right to own a gun or ride a horse, who left a plantation to seek better employment or insisted on being paid for their labor. They were those, young and old, who crowded new schoolhouses and rebuilt those destroyed by terrorists seeking to keep them illiterate.

These were the thousands of courageous and active people who directly fell victim to white terror, while tens of thousands more were victims of the intimidation and fear that ultimately prevailed. They are all doubly victimized when U.S. history textbooks obliterate their courageous efforts.

Freedpeople on the Move

> **With the freeing of the slaves the plantation system broke down. Thousands of freedmen were on the move, possessed with the natural idea that the end of slavery meant 'the day of jubilee' and no more work. Some wandered west because they heard wonderful stories of easy living out there, with hogs lying around 'already baked with the knives and forks sticking in them and fritter ponds everywhere with fritters a-fryin' in them, ponds of grease and money trees.'**
>
> *History of a Free People* (1981), p. 365

Some textbooks repeat a myth that at the war's conclusion, freedpeople "wandered" and "drifted" aimlessly about the South, thinking they would not have to work.

There was much purposeful movement among freedpeople after the war. Many had never been allowed to travel from the plantation where they labored. For them, one of the most tangible meanings of freedom was the ability to travel on their own volition. As Patience Johnson expressed it, when asked by her former mistress to stay and work for wages, "No, Miss, I must go; if I stay here I'll never know I am free." And General O.O. Howard, head of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, observed that, "Many were afraid to remain on the same soil that they had tilled as slaves lest by some trick they might find themselves again in bondage."

Others set out in search of relatives separated by war, or by sale from one slavemaster to another. For them, the joy of freedom was coupled with the anticipation of reunion with loved ones.

Still others set out to find work or better job opportunities. By January, 1866, freedpeople would be required to sign a contract for a year's work and many, aware of the disadvantageous conditions the contracts would impose, hoped to get away and improve their options. Also, General Sherman's Special Field Order (see p. 12), authorizing distribution of 40-acre parcels of land and establishment of self-governing Black communities along the coast from South Carolina to Florida, enticed thousands from inland areas.

Land

> **Thaddeus Stevens and other Radicals had promised every freedman "forty acres and a mule." They intended to take the plantations belonging to the 70,000 or so "chief rebels," as Stevens called them, and redistribute the land. But they never did. The reason was that moderate Republicans considered private property a basic American right. It could not be taken away from its owners without due process of law. Congress therefore made no land provisions for the freed people.**
>
> *The Americans* (1982), p. 318

> **The most serious problem facing Southerners—white and black alike—was how to get the farms producing again. . . . An important part of the problem was to develop a new relationship between the races. . . . a solution to the labor problem had to be found. . . . The problem of operating the farms in the South was solved by the sharecropping system.**
>
> *America: Its People and Values* (1979), p. 487

Textbooks may mention the critical issue of land, but they rarely discuss its significance or the arguments favoring land redistribution. Rather, texts dismiss the issue as an unfounded notion or a rumor among the freedpeople, generated by Thaddeus Stevens. Current texts are more subtle than a 1920 textbook that claimed,

> Their emotional nature led them to believe that miraculous prosperity was to be bestowed upon them without their effort; that the plantations of their late masters were to be divided among them as Christmas and New Year

gifts, and that every negro was to have "forty acres and a mule (*American History*, David Saville Muzzey, Ginn and Company)."

In 1864, the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission, appointed by Secretary of War Stanton, examined the conditions of Black people in order to make federal policy recommendations. The Commission concluded that without land reform, a system of serfdom would develop. It urged that freedpeople be made "owners in fee of the farms and gardens they occupy." One of the Commission members noted that, "No such thing as a free, democratic society can exist in any country where all lands are owned by one class of men and cultivated by another."

In January 1865, General Sherman, with Stanton's assent, issued a Special Field Order setting aside the islands and coastal lands from Charleston, S.C., to the St. Johns River in Florida for settlement by freedpeople. The Order stated that "each family shall have a plot of no more than forty acres of tillable ground" and that "the sole and exclusive management of affairs" in these settlements "will be left to the free people themselves." Possessory title was granted for the duration of the war, with the understanding that the land would then be given them permanently by Congress.

The U.S. government had charge of hundreds of thousands of acres of land abandoned or confiscated for non-payment of taxes. When Congress established the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands in March 1865, it instructed the Bureau to set this land aside for freedpeople and loyal white refugees.

> . . . To every male citizen, whether refugee or freedman, there shall be assigned not more than forty acres of such land and the person to whom it was so assigned shall be protected in the use and enjoyment of the land for three years. At the end of said term, or at any time during said term, the occupants of any parcels so assigned may purchase the land and receive such title thereto as the United States can convey.

By June 1865, 40,000 freedmen and their families were cultivating 300,000 acres of land. Thousands more were on the move to the coast, lured by the promise of land and self-government. Land was crucial if Blacks were to be truly free. "From the angle of vision of the rising black people," Vincent Harding observes, "from the standpoint of any intrinsic justice, these were not wild ideas (*There Is a River*, p. 315)."

As a group of South Carolina Blacks stated in 1865: "Give us our land and we can take care of ourselves. Without land the old masters can hire us or starve us as they please." In 1871, Frances E.W. Harper, a poet and Black anti-slavery lecturer, exhorted listeners in Mobile, Alabama, to:

> Get land, everyone that can, and as fast as you can. A landless people must be dependent upon a landed people. A few acres to till for food and a roof, however humble, over your head, are the castle of your independence, and when you have it you are fortified to act and vote independently whenever your interests are at stake.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911), noted poet and one of the most eloquent anti-slavery lecturers, was born of free parents in Baltimore. During Reconstruction, she worked with freedpeople in almost every Southern state, urging them to get land.

Wendell Phillips, a leading white abolitionist and a graduate of Harvard Law School (who refused to vote, practice law, or perform any function under the U.S. Constitution until the emancipation of slaves), said of the land issue:

> Confiscation is mere naked justice to the former slave. Who brought the land into cultivation? Whose sweat and toil are mixed with it forever? Who cleared the forests? Who made those roads? Whose hand reared those houses? Whose wages are invested in those warehouses and towns? Of course, the Negro's . . . . Why should [they] not have a share of [their] inheritance?

Representative Thaddeus Stevens claimed that the land of the 70,000 wealthiest slaveowners, and public lands in the ex-Confederate states, totalled 394 million acres. The remaining 71 million acres were owned by persons with less than 200 acres each. Stevens proposed that the latter group keep their lands, while the large estates of the "leading rebels" be divided into tracts of 40 acres and distributed among the freedpeople. Since there were almost 1 million Black families in the South, this would amount to about 40 million acres, a fraction of what was available. The rest, Stevens proposed, would be sold to retire the huge national debt created by the war brought on by wealthy slavemasters. This plan, he argued, would meet the needs of the freedpeople for land, leave nine-tenths of the white people in the South untouched, relieve the nation of the huge war debt, and punish the "rebels" for their "treason."

Congress refused to go along with Stevens' proposal. The lack of land redistribution was a fundamental failure of Reconstruction, leaving Blacks economically dependent on whites. As the white editor of the *Moulton Advertiser* in Alabama commented in 1868, "Without confiscation [of land for redistribution], the result of Negro suffrage will slip through their fingers."

Textbooks fail to note that the uncompensated labor of enslaved African Americans and their forebears had made the land productive, developed the economy of the South and produced billions of dollars of wealth—all for the benefit of others. Students are not encouraged to consider what compensation was owed freedpeople for their lifetime of unpaid labor, or whether they should rightfully share in the wealth they had created. Nor are students encouraged to consider the benefits that would have accrued to the nation as a whole from a land redistribution program for freedpeople. This omission is particularly revealing given the Jeffersonian concept of land ownership and small farmers being the base of republican government, a principle applied differentially to Blacks and to whites in textbooks as well as in practice.

When texts suggest that land could not be given to freedpeople without violating "national principles" of property ownership, a racist double standard is evident. Texts rarely note, in this context, that the federal government was then giving millions of acres of land to homesteaders (often immigrants from Europe) and to railroad tycoons. Further, if the taking by force of Indian and Mexican land, and its distribution to whites, is discussed elsewhere, it is seen as acceptable. Yet the idea of taking land from wealthy white exslaveholders, who had rebelled against the United States, and distributing it among African Americans whose forced labor created the slavemasters' wealth, is dismissed as unacceptable.

Missing from the texts is the perspective expressed by Sojourner Truth, who in her 70's was travelling, speaking and organizing a petition campaign to secure land for the freedpeople. While in Washington, D.C., working with desperately poor freedpeople crowded into disease-ridden slums and shanties, she looked at the large buildings in the nation's capital and, in words later paraphrased by someone who heard her, exclaimed:

> We helped to pay this cost. We have been a source of wealth to this republic. Our labor supplied the country with cotton, until villages and cities dotted the enterprising North for its manufacture, and furnished employment and support for a multitude, thereby becoming a revenue to the government. Beneath a burning southern sun have we toiled, in the canebrake and the rice swamp, urged on by the merciless driver's lash, earning millions of money . . . Our nerves and sinews, our tears and blood, have been sacrificed on the altar of this nation's avarice. Our unpaid labor has been a stepping-stone to its financial success. Some of its dividends must surely be ours.

Excluding the various issues and views about land redistribution results in the system of sharecropping being presented as the best solution available for rebuilding the Southern economy. *History of a Free People* terms it "an inevitable result of Southern conditions," quoting one writer that it "seemed the only way by which the inefficient elements of Southern agriculture—an ignorant, unpropertied labor force and a land owning class without capital or authority—could be fused into a productive combination (p. 376)." Texts rarely indicate that sharecropping perpetuated many of the most odious aspects of exploitation existing under slavery. Indeed, *American History* [1982] claims that "most blacks much preferred sharecropping to working for wages (p. 506)."

In 1876, the year in which Reconstruction was dealt its death blow (ironically the 100th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence), Frederick Douglass remarked that:

> When the Russian serfs had their chains broken and were given their liberty . . . the despotic government of Russia gave to those poor emancipated serfs a few acres of land on which they could live and earn their bread. But when you turned us loose, you gave us no acres. You turned us loose to the sky, to the storm, to the whirlwind, and, worst of all, you turned us loose to the wrath of our infuriated masters.

Black Community Building

> **What were the 4 million newly freed Blacks in the South to do? They had no jobs, and few skills outside farming. How would they feed and clothe themselves? How would they live?**
>
> *The Americans* (1982), p. 311

> **What was to become of the freedmen? They would need food, homes and jobs. They would need education and training. But they did not get these things along with freedom. What they got was the opportunity to work as free men. To succeed, the freedmen needed the help of the nation that had freed them.**
>
> *America: Its People and Values* (1979), p. 476

Textbooks generally imply that freed Blacks lacked the skills needed to build independent lives. Newer texts are somewhat more subtle than an earlier text that claimed, "few of them had any sense of responsibility or any capacity or capital for beginning a life of industrial freedom (*American History*, David Saville Muzzey, Ginn and Company, 1920)."

Black people had been the labor force of the South. Not only had they been responsible for most aspects of planting, growing and harvesting of crops, but it is estimated that, in 1865, 100,000 of 120,000 Southern artisans were Black.

Textbooks' distortion of the capabilities and skills of the freedpeople is magnified by the omission of any mention of the successful communities freedpeople created—when they were able to get land. In Hampton, Virginia, abandoned and confiscated lands had been set aside by the U.S. government for Black refugees and 4,500 settled there. In 1865, the president of their association wrote:

> There are now 800 families upon said lands, each with a humble tenement erected by themselves. The value of the property owned by them amounts to $51,006. We have five churches built by ourselves since the Rebellion and pay our pastors $1,050 per annum. We have a store of

A view of Hampton, Virginia, one of the new communities African Americans created when they got land.

> our own in Hampton, filled with groceries and goods of all sorts, kept and managed by an Association of our own selection, for the benefit of the colored people. Our settlement . . . is laid out in streets, with order and regularity. The farms . . . will this year yield better, richer and heavier crops than was ever known under the system of Slavery. . . . We are anxious and willing, and believe we are able, to build up a city upon our lands, as orderly, as prosperous, as religious, as patriotic, and as intelligent as could be done by any other people, provided we can secure the fee to the lands.

A visitor to the Hampton community remarked, "I found it a thrifty village, occupied chiefly by freedmen [with] sash-factory and blacksmith's shop, shoemakers' shops and stores . . . . I found no idleness anywhere."

Davis Bend, in Mississippi, was another such community. It was established on the plantations of Jefferson Davis and his brother after Union forces took the area in 1863. A thousand people gathered there, and plots of 30 acres each were divided among 70 able-bodied men, with a Black U.S. army regiment protecting them from Confederates. The effort was so successful that by 1865 another 5,000 acres were divided among 1,800 Blacks organized into 181 companies. The government provided equipment and supplies which were repaid when crops were sold. The people opened stores, established a school, and set up a government. In 1865, after paying expenses, they cleared $160,000. General Eaton, then in charge of Black affairs in Mississippi, later wrote that the Davis Bend community "distinctly demonstrated the capacity of the Negro to take care of himself and exercise under honest and competent direction the functions of self-government." (Davis Bend and other similar ventures were destroyed when the ex-Confederates were pardoned by President Johnson and allowed to reclaim their former land.)

General Saxton, in charge of the Freedmen's Bureau in South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, remarked of freedpeople in the Sea Islands off the coast:

> Very many of the freedmen who three years ago were utterly destitute have been able by their earnings to buy themselves from ten to twenty acres of land, a horse, mule or yoke of oxen, a cow, a cart, even good light vehicles for driving—household utensils—clothing and in several cases they have had houses built for themselves in their own lots.

Saxton noted that the "thrift and success of the freedmen makes them objects of attention to their former masters," who regularly returned, pleaded poverty, and received food, clothing and money from those they once claimed as property. And *The National Freedman* reported, in June 1865, that on one of the islands, Black farmers had completed improvements amounting to a sum "large enough to have purchased the whole island three years ago, with all the improvements of 200 years under the rule and culture of its white inhabitants."

As the ex-Confederates were pardoned and sought to regain their holdings in the Sea Islands, Saxton pleaded with Congress to buy the land and let the freedpeople remain. He wrote that "the freedmen have established civil governments with constitutions and laws, with all the different departments for schools, churches, building roads, and other improvements." He reminded Congress that when freedpeople had been urged to cross to the Sea Islands during the war, "the faith of the government was solemnly pledged to maintain them in possession."

On the Sea Islands, Black farmers refused to return confiscated land to the former owners, arming themselves with whatever weapons were available to turn back returning planters as well as U.S. troops. Said one Black leader to some former slavemasters attempting to reclaim property, "You had better go back to Charleston, and go to work there, and if you can do nothing else, you can pick oysters and earn your living as the loyal people have done—by the sweat of their brows." Such resistance paid off in some cases. In 1866, when Congress extended the life of the Freedmen's Bureau, it made provisions for settling the land disputes on the Sea Islands, acknowledging by its action the fait accompli brought about by Black resistance.

Great White Men

> . . . a time during which the country's leaders were struggling to reconstruct . . . the nation.
>
> *The Americans* (1982), p. 310

> One group of leaders called for harsh revenge on the South. Another group, headed by Abraham Lincoln, wanted generous peace terms . . . . Unfortunately for the South, and for the nation as a whole, Lincoln did not live to guide the North in peace . . . . Instead . . . the Radical Republicans gained control of the reconstruction . . . . As a result, the rift between North and South widened.
>
> *Let Freedom Ring* (1980), p. 341

> Underlying the national tension was a deep distrust between Congress and President Johnson . . . . Thaddeus Stevens . . . now old and crippled [was] the leading advocate of harshness toward the South.
>
> *Let Freedom Ring* (1980), p. 346

Textbooks tend to explain history—including Reconstruction—through the exploits and actions of individual white men. This "Great White Men" approach explains most social change as resulting from the exercise of political power by important national leaders, omitting, for example, the central role African Americans played in post-war social change. Poor white Southerners, striking workers in the North, women struggling for the vote, Indian people fighting for their sovereignty and lands—these groups play no role in the Reconstruction period as told by U.S. history texts. Lincoln, Johnson, Stevens, Grant and a few other politicians are credited with the whole scenario.

Great White Men are presented as individual actors, divorced from larger social forces. Their actions are more often attributed to personality or psychology, than to ideological principles or affiliations with particular social, economic or political forces. Thus, Johnson's "stubborness," "arrogance," or "uncompromising manner" are offered as explanations for his actions, rather than his white supremacist affiliations and views ("This is a country for white men, and by God, so long as I am President, it shall be a government for white men.") Thaddeus Stevens, "old and crippled," "hard-boiled," with "harsh features" and "piercing eyes and a thin-lipped mouth," is the "leading advocate for harshness toward the South," rather than a dedicated advocate of a more democratic, non-racist society.

Lincoln emerges from most texts as a near saint, "mild and forgiving," preaching "malice toward none . . . charity for all," and offering a "practical and flexible" plan for Reconstruction. "Unfortunately for the South, and for the nation as a whole, Lincoln did not live *(Let Freedom Ring*, p. 341)." This conclusion is based on the premise that the problems of the period resulted largely from the clash of personalities between Congress and President. If texts offered more about the fundamental questions of race facing the country, about the struggles of African Americans to create freedom, and about efforts of powerful segments of white society to maintain white domination, the conclusions about Lincoln would be somewhat altered. With Lincoln's disparaging views about Black people, and his ambivalence towards white domination, it could be argued that he would not have significantly altered the ultimate betrayal of democracy.

The Great White Men approach to history offers a dichotomy of "good guys" and "bad guys." If Lincoln represents the former, Thaddeus Stevens epitomizes the latter. On Stevens' shoulders is placed the responsibility for most of what the texts find wrong with Reconstruction, particularly the Congressional Reconstruction legislation. In fact, moderate Republicans, not the "Radicals" like Stevens, authored and provided the votes for most of that legislation.

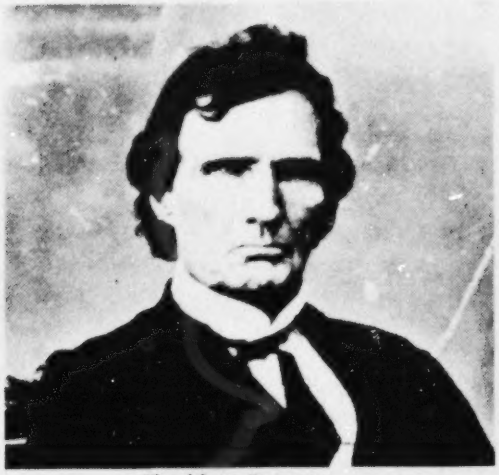
Texts portray Stevens as "harsh" and "vindictive," a man operating out of "hatred." One text claims he hated ex-Confederates, another that he hated former slaveholders, and another that "he came to hate white Southerners as well." By describing Stevens' motivation as "hatred" or "vindictiveness," and characterizing the legislation for which he is credited as "harshness" towards and "punishment" of the South, texts neatly avoid dealing with issues of racial justice, equity, democracy and political representation. Yet these issues are exactly why such legislation was needed. Only one text admits, after claiming that Stevens "came to hate white Southerners" and was "determined to teach them a hard lesson they would never forget," that:

> The fact was, of course, that white Southerners . . . did not want to give Blacks more civil rights than were absolutely necessary. And they passed harsh, unjust laws against their ex-slaves. So the first Reconstruction Act was the price they had to pay *(The Americans*, p. 315).

Stevens has long served as Reconstruction's evil progenitor in the white supremacist mythology. The villainous "Stoneman" character, who championed the "barbaric Negro rule of the South" in D.W. Griffith's movie "Birth of a Nation," was based on Stevens. Howard N. Meyer observes that oblivion, defamatory distortion, and political character assassination block the legacy of anti-racist whites "from becoming a heritage from which young people—indeed all people—can learn today." Meyer writes that Stevens and Charles Sumner, another "Radical Republican" often mentioned by texts:

> . . . recognized, and in every fiber of their beings rejected, the concept on which slavery was based: "the assumed fact . . . that the Negroes are an inferior race, over whom the whites possess not merely an artificial superiority dependent upon the existing circumstances of their mutual position, but a natural superiority, which exists and ever must exist." To the deathbed and to the grave, Sumner and Stevens rejected and combatted this (*In These Times*, July 18-24, 1979).

Stevens has suffered the greatest posthumous defamation of character. Yet when Stevens died in 1868, he was "revered by millions. His funeral was said to have elicited an



Thaddeus Stevens

outpouring of grief matched only by that of Lincoln. But, as the nation retreated from Reconstruction and the ideal of an interracial democracy, Stevens was first maligned and then forgotten . . . (Foner, *New York Times*, 12/31/76)."

Texts that mention Stevens' proposal to break up the largest plantations for land redistribution usually dismiss it as "too extreme." None quote his view that, "Nothing is so likely to make a man a good citizen as to make him a freeholder. Small independent landholders are the support and guardian of Republican liberty." As Foner observes, these sentiments "could have been written by Jefferson. What set Stevens apart, of course, was simply that he wanted to apply these principles to Blacks as well as whites (*New York Times*, 12/31/76)."

Stevens had a long record of active support of public education (he was known in Pennsylvania as "the father of the common school"). Foner remarks that, "What is most striking, is how thoroughly traditional his beliefs actually were. What could be more American than support for universal suffrage, defense of a free public school system, and the conviction that small farmers are the backbone of the Republic *(New York Times*, 12/31/76)."

As his health was deteriorating and he was close to death, Stevens was carried into the House of Representatives daily, "to continue to the end the struggle against" racism. He instructed that he should be buried in an interracial cemetery (then quite rare) and composed the following inscription for his gravestone:

> I repose in this quiet and secluded spot,
> Not from any natural preference for
> solitude
> But finding other Cemeteries limited
> as to race by Charter Rules
> I have chosen this that I might
> illustrate in my death
> The principles which I advocated
> Through a long life:
> EQUALITY OF MAN BEFORE
> HIS CREATOR

Education

At first most white southerners sneered at the very idea of educating the freedmen. But many came to admit that blacks could learn as well as whites. Most blacks who were educated became good and useful citizens. Thus all but the most prejudiced whites changed their minds.

American History (1982), p. 502

Life was not always pleasant for the students or the teachers. Sometimes the teachers could not find rooms to rent. Other times they could not get credit at local stores. Whites threw stones at the students as they went to and from school. But neither the teachers nor the students would give up.

The Americans (1982), p. 313

The first quote is a concoction of unfounded assertions about what "most white southerners" were thinking. It is patronizing in its discussion of Black people's ability to learn and become "good and useful citizens." It ignores the widespread white assaults on schools attended by Black students, assaults also downplayed in the second quote.

By the mid-1830's, all the slave states had laws prohibiting the education of enslaved Blacks. Literacy was feared because it increased the skills and knowledge available to oppressed people in their resistance to slavery.

Gaining literacy, and sharing it with others, was a form of resistance in which Black women played a central role. Suzie King Taylor, born under Georgia's slave law in 1848, taught in a school for newly freed adults and children during Reconstruction. During the war, she served as a nurse in the first Union regiment of Black men. As a child, she had been taught to read by a free Black woman in Savannah, where Taylor lived with her grandmother.

> My brother and I . . . went every day with our books wrapped in paper to prevent the police or white persons from seeing them. We went in one at a time to the kitchen, which was the school room . . . . The neighbors would see us going in some time, but they supposed we were there learning trades.

With two years of lessons, Taylor put her ability to read and write to good use. "I often wrote passes for my grandmother, for all colored persons, free or slave, were compelled to have a pass." To be caught out after nine at night without one meant jail.

Milla Granson learned to read from the children of the man who enslaved her in Louisiana. Late at night, she would teach 12 others to read and write, starting with a new group once she had passed on all her skills. Of the hundreds of people she taught, a number wrote their own passes and set off for Canada.

As Black women risked gaining and sharing literacy, they were able,

> to increase the store of knowledge available to the slave

community, to aid in escape and rebellion, . . . to see themselves as having some power, through literacy, to affect their personal circumstances [and] to gain knowledge of politics, literature and the abolitionist movement, and news of the coming war. They were further able to act on that information by increasing the mobility of blacks within their communities and by helping some to depart as passengers on the Underground Railroad (Marilyn Richardson, p. 18).

Given the importance and difficulty of gaining literacy during slavery, it is small wonder that during Reconstruction, teachers like Suzie King Taylor found Black adults and children "eager to learn to read, to read above everything else." Schooling and literacy were, along with land, priorities for Black people after slavery. Schools were established by freedpeople in their cabins and churches, and those who could read taught others. Some Black soldiers established primary schools in their barracks.

Thousands of Northern teachers travelled South during and after the war to teach the freedpeople. Charlotte Forten, a Black teacher from Philadelphia, went to the Georgia Sea Islands to teach in 1862. She wrote of her students:

> I never before saw children so eager to learn. . . . The older ones, during the summer, work in the fields from early morning until eleven or twelve o'clock, and then come to school, after their hard toil in the hot sun, as bright and as anxious to learn as ever.

In 1866, an agent of the Freedmen's Bureau in North Carolina wrote that the "colored people are far more zealous in the cause of education than the whites. They will starve themselves, and go without clothes, in order to send their children to school."

By 1869, there were 9,000 teachers in the South instructing ex-slave children. Women, Black and white, were the backbone of the Freedmen's Bureau schools. By 1870, 4,300 schools were operating with close to 250,000 Black children attending.

Mothers brought their children to school, agreeing to do the children's share of farm work. Edmonia Highgate, teaching in Lafayette Parish, Louisiana, wrote:

> The majority of my pupils come from plantations, three, four and even eight miles distant. So anxious are they to learn that they walk these distances so early in the morning as never to be tardy.
>
> There has been much opposition to the School. Twice I have been shot at in my room. My night school scholars have been shot but none killed. A week ago an aged freedman just across the way was shot so badly as to break his arm and leg. The rebels here threatened to burn down the school and house in which I board yet they have not materially harmed us. The nearest military protection is two hundred miles distant at New Orleans.

George T. Ruby, a New Yorker who taught school in Louisiana from 1864-66, wrote of his experience in the town of Jackson:

> Finally a school was established in the house where I boarded. When we opened the school a party of armed men came to my house, seized me, carried me out and threw me in Thompson's Creek after they had belabored me with the muzzles of their revolvers. Their plea was that they "did not want to have any damned nigger school in that town and were not going to have it."

Some whites opposed education for Blacks, fearing it would spoil them as fieldhands. Some opposed the cost of public education, while others argued that Northern teachers were advocating racial equality. In Mississippi, opposition to the schools was a major aspect of KKK activity, but schools were subjected to white terrorism all through the South. General O.O. Howard, head of the Freedmen's Bureau, detailed the extensive violence against Black schools.

> The opposition to negro education made itself felt everywhere in a combination not to allow the freedmen any room or building in which a school might be taught. In 1865, 1866 and 1867 mobs of the baser classes at intervals and in all parts of the South occasionally burned school buildings and churches used as schools, flogged teachers or drove them away and in a number of instances murdered them (p. 172).

The establishment of public school systems in states where none previously existed was a major achievement of the Reconstruction governments. However, due to the widespread violence against the schools and the short existence of the Reconstruction governments, it is estimated that less than one-third of Southern Black children received formal education during the period.

As early as 1873, the Democrat-controlled Savannah Board of Education, operating with a budget of $64,000, was spending less than $3,000 on Black schools, even though there were more Black than white children to be served. Separate and unequal schooling had begun. The end of Reconstruction brought the end of schooling for many Black children and, in some places, for poor whites as well. The eloquent plea of Representative Joseph Rainey of South Carolina to the House of Representatives in 1872 went unheeded.

> . . . ignorance is widespread; it is not confined to any one state. This mental midnight is a national calamity, not sectional. The great remedy is free schools, established and aided by the Government throughout the land.

Armed White Patrols

All over the South, white southerners formed secret groups or societies. The main purpose of these societies was to keep blacks from voting.

The New Exploring American History (1981), p. 333

Unable to strike openly at the federal government, they organized secret, terrorist societies, of which the most important was the Ku Klux Klan. Hooded, white-robed Klansmen, riding in bands at night, intimidated carpetbaggers, teachers in the new Negro schools, and above all the Negroes themselves. The Klan was quite willing to use violence to back up its threats.

History of a Free People (1981), p. 373

Contemporary textbooks tend to minimize the white violence used to overturn Reconstruction's gains. There is cursory discussion of the Ku Klux Klan, generally referred to as a "secret society." The texts provide little information to help students understand the nature of the Klan and other violent white supremacist groups. Many fail to mention that white terrorist attacks were also directed against whites who worked in the governments or in any way cooperated with Blacks. Only one text quotes from the Congressional testimony of victims of white supremacist violence. And none mentions the terrorists' roots in the pre-war slave patrols.

Armed force had been a prerequisite for the maintenance of slavery. A North Carolina planter observed that, ". . . there is no such thing as having an obedient and useful slave, without the painful exercise of undue and tyrannical authority." Historian John Anthony Scott observes that "naked force" was required not only to continually extract labor from the slave population, but also to stifle the ever-present resistance, to recover runaways, to frustrate conspiracy and to suppress insurrection. The overriding aim was "to enforce segregation. . . . Without this power to enforce the isolation of the slave—to pin [them] both night and day to the place where [their] services were needed—slavery could not have endured (p. 1)."

As slavery developed in the South, the exercise of such force evolved from the responsibility of the slavemaster to that of the state. The slave patrols, as they developed in large plantation areas, were public militias in which all white men, slaveholders or not, were required to participate. Their duties were "patrolling the roads at night to prevent escapes, chasing and recovering fugitives, detecting and breaking up unauthorized gatherings of slaves, searching cabins for arms, and in general preventing any movement of slaves not authorized by a written pass (Scott, p. 2)."

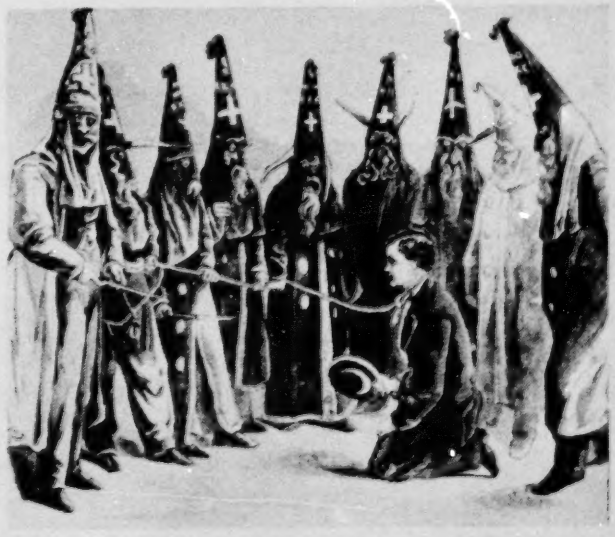
The patrols exercised force and terror in excess, both to punish individuals guilty of infractions and to intimidate the community of enslaved people. Patrollers were conditioned to perceive slaves as subhumans deserving of vicious treatment, including rapes, beatings, whippings, mutilations and grotesque murders. Much of the Southern white male population was thus accustomed to functioning in organized, armed militia, brutalizing Blacks in order to control their labor and repress their struggle for freedom. And Black people were all too familiar with the violence of the "paterollers," as they called them.

Scott reports that after the war, the patrols "were restored to full operation across the South.

> . . . the slaveholders began to reconstruct the apparatus which would restore the Black people as docile workers to the land which they had previously cultivated as slaves. The objective here, from the middle of 1865 on, was nothing less than to destroy the Black people's newly-asserted right of movement, to compel them to return to the plantations, to remain upon them, and to accept without question the terms of work—under the euphemism of a "labor contract"—which the masters chose to impose (p. 16).

From 1865 to 1867, under President Johnson's restored planter governments, white men were again mobilized into armed patrols. Using violence, brutality and terror, they enforced the Black Codes, supervised a pass system regulating freedpeople's movement, searched Black homes for weapons, and attempted to prevent Blacks from gathering to organize and assert their rights.

The organization of white men into officially constituted patrols ended with the Reconstruction Act of 1867. Congress replaced the planter governments with U.S. Army rule, and then with new state governments elected by Black and white men. However, powerful segments of the white community now sought not only to control Black labor and repress Black people's assertion of rights, but to regain exclusive white control of political power. To attain these objectives, they had at hand an infrastructure and tradition of armed white patrols. Night-riding white terrorist groups rapidly formed across the South, with a necessary element



While white terrorists primarily attacked Black people, they often assaulted or killed whites working to build a more democratic, nonracist society.

of hidden identity, since now, for the first time, they operated outside the law.

These groups adopted names such as the Ku Klux Klan, Knights of the White Camellia, Pale Faces, and White Brotherhood. They assassinated Black and white Republican Party leadership; murdered or threatened preachers and teachers who encouraged assertions of rights and literacy; punished whites who associated with Blacks; drove off or killed Blacks who had acquired some land and were successfully farming; and prevented Blacks and white Republicans from voting. In 1871, Congress outlawed the Ku Klux Klan and empowered the administration to put down the terrorist insurrection. Federal prosecutions increased, temporarily, and the Ku Klux Klan disbanded, as a formal organization.

In Tennessee, North Carolina, Virginia and Georgia, its activities were no longer needed, since the violent white counter-revolution had already "redeemed" those state governments. Control of the Black population became an official responsibility of state and local authorities. In non-"redeemed" states, such as Mississippi, the activities of armed bands of white men continued and expanded, but now without the hidden identity (see "Elections and Terrorism," pp. 28-29). By the early 1870's, it was evident that the federal government would not put down the violence. The white counter-revolution swept ahead.

Textbooks vary considerably in their descriptions of the white violence, often using words or phrases that minimize it. One text states that, "Between 1868 and 1871, the Klan and other secret groups are reported to have killed some 20,000 men, women and children, most of them black (*The Americans*, p. 322)." Others, in contrast, report that "When blacks would not give up their political rights, Klansmen burned their homes, beat them, and *even murdered some* of them (*The Free and the Brave*, p. 459)." "When warnings failed, cabins and churches were burned and *some* freed slaves were beaten or killed. White sympathizers and friends of blacks *sometimes* received the same treatment (*Rise of the American Nation*, p. 399)." "When blacks refused to be frightened, the Klan often carried out its threats. Hundreds of black Southerners were beaten, other *hundreds actually murdered* by the Klan (*American History*, p. 508)."

Disfranchisement

Under the Reconstruction governments, the majority of white Southerners had no voice in their state governments. *America: Its People and Values* (1979), p. 481

Many of the former Confederates were determined not to be ruled by scalawags, carpetbaggers, and former slaves. These Southerners set out to win back their places in the state governments of the South. They had been denied the right to vote, so they could not gain control legally. Thus, they tried illegal, or unlawful, methods. *America: Its People and Values* (1979), p. 485

Since most whites were not allowed to vote, black voters were a majority in many areas.
American History (1979), p. 354

Those who had held office under the Confederacy or had "given aid and comfort" to enemies of the United States lost their suffrage. This meant that the majority of white southern males were disfranchised.
History of a Free People (1981), p. 369

New textbooks perpetuate misinformation about the disfranchisement of Southern white men during Reconstruction. The statement that "the majority of white Southern males were disfranchised," is an example of a myth about Reconstruction "prostrating the South" still being presented in U.S. schoolbooks. It is particularly distressing since this myth is presented as an explanation for why white Southerners (supposedly denied the right to participate in government) formed the Ku Klux Klan. To state that the "majority of white Southerners had no voice in their state governments" is true, since white women were excluded. Yet that was also true prior to and after Reconstruction, so it is unlikely that the statement refers to that fact.

In calling for the election of delegates to draft new state constitutions, the Reconstruction Act of 1867 declared that they be elected by males over 21, "of whatever race, color, or previous condition." Voters were required to be state residents for at least a year, "except such as may be disfranchised for participation in the rebellion or for felony at common law. . . ." No one excluded from public office by the 14th Amendment could be a member of, or vote for delegates to, the constitutional conventions. The 14th Amendment barred from public office those who had taken an oath to support the U.S. Constitution as a member of Congress, officer of the United States, state legislator, or executive or judicial officer of any state, and then "engaged in insurrection or rebellion" against the U.S., or gave "aid or comfort to the enemies thereof." Only Congress, by two-thirds vote, could remove "such disability."

Disfranchisement was thus directed only against the Confederate leadership of the rebellion against the United States. About 200,000 ex-Confederates were disqualified from registering to vote in 1867. Anywhere from 625,000 to 660,000 white men *were* registered, along with about 700,000 Black men. Many poor white men, who had been denied the vote by property qualifications under the slavocracy, were enfranchised during Reconstruction—a fact that textbooks frequently fail to mention.

Some states adopted their own disfranchisement provisions. The severest were passed before Black men got the vote and in states where Blacks were a distinct minority, such as Arkansas, West Virginia, Tennessee and Missouri. South Carolina, Georgia, Florida and Texas disfranchised very little, if at all. Allen Trelease says that "a free and unfettered majority rule permitted Republican victories in most states, and disfranchisement was abandoned almost at once or very soon (*White Terror*, pp. xxviii-xxix)."

White Southerners

White Southerners wanted to end the Reconstruction state governments.

America's Heritage (1982), p. 313

Southern whites who had not fought in the Civil War were also in the new governments. They favored Congress's Reconstruction program and were called scalawags.

The New Exploring American History (1981), p. 332

Whatever their motives, scalawags were considered traitors by most white Southerners. (The word "scalawag" means "scoundrel.")

The Americans (1982), p. 319

The scalawags were southern businessmen and former planters. No one knows for sure how they got this nickname, which means "worthless or dishonest person." The scalawags wanted laws passed that would help their businesses.

The Free and the Brave (1980), p. 457

Scalawags, on the other hand, were native Southerners who decided to side with the Republicans. Scalawag was a popular term meaning "runty" or "mean," and supposedly signified the only kind of "low Southerner" who would line up with the "enemy." Some, indeed, were from the lowest levels of white society, but most were planters or business people.

Let Freedom Ring (1980), p. 351

Textbooks often refer to "the South" or "Southerners," when they mean white Southerners. This not only ignores the quarter of the population that was Black, but presents Southern whites as an undifferentiated mass united in its interests and opposition to Reconstruction.

In 1860, there were about 385,000 slave-owning families among 1,516,000 free families in the South. "Nearly three-fourths of all free Southerners had no connection with slavery through either family ties or direct ownership (Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution*, p. 30)." Of those who held slaves, 88 percent held less than 20 and almost 50 percent held less than 5. The aristocracy among planters consisted of about ten thousand families who held more than 50 slaves, while the extremely wealthy families, controlling over 100 slaves each, numbered less than three thousand. It was this small group of large, wealthy planters that wielded the basic economic and political power in the slave states, together with bankers, lawyers and wealthier urban merchants.

The largest segment of Southern whites was small farmers, with few or no slaves, independent artisans and highlanders. There also was a group of landless, unskilled people called "poor whites."

Most non-slaveholding whites were small farmers, with land primarily in the less productive hilly and mountainous areas. Many had been driven from the more productive low-lands by the expansion of the large planters. They harbored considerable resentment of the wealthy planters, whose control of the best lands left many of them to scratch out an existence.

Non-slaveholding whites gained little from slavery. They had little voice in state governments controlled by the slavocracy and little opportunity for advancement in rigid caste-structured societies. Any attempt to speak out against the system would have been violently suppressed. During the war, many of the upland areas populated by white small farmers remained loyal to the Union. It was from non-slaveholding and poor whites that the slavocracy secured the bulk of Confederate soldiers. While many deserted during the war, they represented a large percentage of the 260,000 Confederate soldiers who died. White Southerners emerged bloodied and exhausted from slavocracy's war. If the resentment among many of them for the large planters was not lessened, neither was their sense of superiority over Black people. Most had been indoctrinated to accept, support and defend the subjugation and exploitation of African people.

Lookout posted, "Southern Unionists" secretly meet in Louisiana in 1866. They complained that power had returned to "the old dominant slave-owning class [that] kept the poor white man ignorant and useless." They warned that this would result in "neither the improvement of the black nor white race."

There was collaboration between some whites and Blacks in the early period of Reconstruction. Many of those representing both groups in government favored some form of land redistribution. Had such a program been realized, larger numbers of whites would have been attracted to Reconstruction's transformation of Southern society. In the constitutional conventions and legislatures, representatives of both groups worked for extension of suffrage, public schools, increased social welfare, more equitable taxes and easing restrictions on those in debt. Yet those whites, many of whom worked with Blacks to build a more equitable society, continue to be referred to in textbooks by the term "scalawags," an epithet meaning "rascals" or "scamps." Lerone Bennett, Jr., observes that the "much-maligned Scalawags were, in many instances, leaders of poor whites who entered into a shaky alliance with Negroes. For this, the South has never forgiven them (*Confrontation*, p. 68)." Nor, it would seem, have many textbooks.

Most whites who supported the Republicans were concentrated in the hilly and mountainous regions outside the large plantation areas. Among them were poor whites hostile to the Democrat Party of wealthy planters, wartime Union supporters and former members of the Whig Party, including some large planters. Old-line Whigs and bitter opponents of the Democrats constituted a significant proportion of the Southern whites involved in Mississippi's government between re-admission in 1870 and the counter-revolution's bloody election victory in 1875. During those five years, Southern white Republicans were one-third of Mississippi's Congressional delegation, one of the governors, two of the three supreme court justices, and about one-third of both houses of the state legislature. Many of these men, as Bennett remarks of Governor James Alcorn, "accepted the *principle* of equality in order to moderate the *practice* of equality (*Black Power U.S.A.*, p. 203)."

Many textbooks fail to mention that Southern white Republicans were frequent targets of white supremacist violence. Leaders were murdered and voters threatened. Those who socialized with Blacks were especially targeted.

The large planters were able to use the allure of "white supremacy," charges of "Black rule" and "corruption," and cries of "carpetbag governments" and "home rule" to dampen the attraction Reconstruction offered to poorer whites. Terrorist attacks and intimidation silenced many others. Disaffection among white small farmers developed from the pro-business and pro-railroad policies of the Republican-dominated state and national governments, policies often at odds with the perceived interests of the small farmers.

Ultimately, an alliance between the planters, white small farmers and poor whites, succeeded in overthrowing Reconstruction. In some areas, gains achieved by poorer whites, such as schools, were lost. The South returned to the closed, rigid society of pre-war days. Disaffection among white small farmers and poor whites grew, developing into the Populist movement of the 1890's and, for a time, collaboration once again with Blacks.

Black Political Representation

> Even when the Negroes held a majority of the legislative seats, they were subordinate to whites. In any case, the carpetbag governments were, as a recent historian says, "an unfair test of the Negro's capacity for self-government." The conditions under which the freedmen had lived in slavery had been deliberately designed to keep them illiterate, helpless, and dependent. They could not suddenly acquire the skills needed to carry on government successfully.
>
> *History of a Free People* (1981), p. 370

> Many in both the white and the black groups [in the new governments] had very little training for their new jobs. As a result, some bad things were done as well as some good things.
>
> *The New Exploring American History* (1981), p. 332

> How well did the Radical state governments do? It is hard to judge because the answer depends on how you look at it. The idea that men who had recently been slaves should be taking important parts in the government made many white southerners furious. To these men, the Radical lawmaking bodies seemed terrible. It was hard to make very good lawmakers out of people who had little education or training.
>
> *The Free and the Brave* (1980), p. 48

Textbooks too often leave the impression that Black men were not very good or successful lawmakers. Their incompetence is said to derive from their having been slaves, "illiterate, helpless, and dependent," with "little education or training." Their involvement in Reconstruction governments was "an unfair test of the Negro's capacity for self-government."

Older textbooks presented the same message, but in less genteel language. "They had been slaves all their lives, and were so ignorant that they did not even know the letters of the alphabet. Yet now they sat in the state legislatures and made the laws (1920)"; "Those in power were too ignorant to govern wisely (1933)"; "the rule of the negro . . . was an indescribable orgy of . . . disgusting incompetence,—a travesty on government (1920)"; ". . . the South was ruled largely by ignorant Negroes . . . abruptly elevated from slavery . . . illiterate and inexperienced in governmental affairs (1943)."

Such characterization of Black politicians reflects a racist caricature of Black people as incompetent. [See box "Fitness is . . . but another word for color."] Perhaps nowhere is the assertion more slanderous than in its application to Black lawmakers in the Reconstruction governments. As Lerone Bennett, Jr., notes, "practically all the Negro leaders of Reconstruction had more formal education than Abraham Lincoln (*Confrontation*, p. 69)." Allen Trelease likewise observes:

> The quality of these Negro officeholders high and low who did pass the barrier was not notably better or worse than

that of white men who held comparable posts at that time, before, or later. Some, especially in the lower levels, were illiterate, but so were some of their white counterparts of both parties. Incompetent and illiterate officials did not begin or end with Reconstruction, nor were they typical of that period (*White Terror*, p. xxvi).

The claim that those who helped create the most democratic constitutions and governments the South had known lacked "the skills needed to carry on government successfully" is used to discredit both the individuals and their achievements. Such assertions rationalize the return to white supremacy, implying that whites were more capable lawmakers. Whites who served in pre-Reconstruction government and passed laws to prevent enslaved people from gaining literacy or failed to provide public schools for white children, are implicitly considered successful and capable lawmakers. On the other hand, lawmakers whose many accomplishments included establishing schools for *all* children are said to lack "capacity for self-government" and to not be "good lawmakers." Such is the curious logic found in contemporary U.S. history texts. Absent from texts is the viewpoint expressed well by William Gray at a Black convention in Arkansas. "I am not willing to trust the rights of my people with the white men, as they have not preserved those of their own race, in neglecting to provide them with the means of education."

Textbooks misrepresent the meaning of "democracy" by suggesting that "education" and "training" are primary criteria for "good lawmakers." Black legislators proved considerably more capable of *representing* the interests of Blacks and of most whites, than had the whites who preceded them, regardless of any difference in education or training. And representation is, as most texts explain in relation to whites, the essential component of democracy. The failure to apply this principle in discussing Black political representation during Reconstruction reflects a blatant double standard.

Robert B. Elliot, Eton graduate and renowned orator, served in the South Carolina Constitutional Convention, the State Assembly, the U.S. House of Representatives and as South Carolina's Attorney General.

Richard Cain, a delegate to the 1868 South Carolina Constitutional Convention, expressed the principle of representation embodied in the Declaration of Independence:

> Whether learned or ignorant he has an inalienable right to say who shall govern him. He may not understand a great deal of knowledge that is derived from books but he can judge between right and wrong. For two hundred years it has been the curse of the slave states that a certain class of men have deprived the majority of the right to express their will.

The failure to extend the same right of democratic political representation to African Americans that is enjoyed by European Americans, represents the nation's white supremacist contradiction. The failure of contemporary textbooks to apply the principle equally to whites and to Blacks is indicative of continuing white supremacist perspectives in our society and in its schoolbooks.

"Fitness Is . . . But Another Word for Color"

When studying the Reconstruction period, one is struck by the many similarities with issues in contemporary U.S. society. The following editorial from the New Orleans *Tribune*, June 18, 1867, is a prime example of this déjà vu.

Some of our friends, through good motives are indignant at the words "white" and "black" being found still in the proceedings of a Radical Convention. They argue, and not without some show of reason, that men who aspire to eradicate all distinctions on account of race should not take into consideration these very distinctions. But to this we must answer that in order to suppress a wrong it is not sufficient to omit mentioning it. We have to see that no such wrong shall be committed in the future.

It is said fitness should be the only qualification for office. We agree. But fitness should be as readily recognized in a black man as in a white; and this has not been the fact since the Reconstruction bill has been passed. Eleven ward clubs have been organized in the city of New Orleans and only ONE [black] President was chosen. Was it that only ONE man from among our 17,000 colored citizens was fit to occupy the chair of a political assembly? N o one will assume that position. It was, therefore, because their fitness was disregarded.

Nearly 200 registrars were appointed for the State of Louisiana. NOT A SINGLE CITIZEN of African descent was selected. Was it because none was fit?

Fitness is, at the present time, but another word for color. It reminds one of the celebrated inscription that the Spaniard Menendez affixed, two centuries ago, to the gallows where he suspended the companions of the Frenchman Rigaud, in the Carolinas. As Spain and France were at peace, as the white and colored Republicans are today, the Spaniard did not dare to hang the Frenchmen as such and therefore he inscribed upon the gallows: "Hanged—not as Frenchmen, but as heretics." The modern Menendez will say to colored applicants: "Rejected—not as Africans, but as incapable."

Northerners in Southern Governments

> Carpetbaggers were Northerners who had come South to help the blacks register, vote and gain power. Many of them were eager as well to boost their own fortunes.
>
> *Let Freedom Ring* (1980), p. 351

> The carpetbaggers came for many different reasons. Some sincerely wanted to help the freed slaves exercise their newly acquired rights. Some wanted to get themselves elected to political office. Some came to make their fortunes by acquiring farmland or by starting new businesses. However, some came for reasons of pure greed or fraud.
>
> *Rise of the American Nation* (1982), p. 398

> Carpetbag Governments. Some of the leaders of the new state governments set up under the Radical program were Northerners whom the South called "carpetbaggers". . . . The epithet stuck, and as "carpetbag governments" they have been known ever since. . . . Some of the carpetbaggers were respectable, honest men sincerely devoted to the public interest, but enough of them were self-seeking to give the carpetbag governments a reputation for graft and inefficiency. . . .
>
> *History of a Free People* (1981), p. 370

Current textbooks tend to be less negative in their depiction of Northern whites who participated in the Reconstruction governments than were earlier versions. "Unscrupulous whites," "unprincipled white men," "disreputable Northerners," "greedy adventurers," "low-minded adventurers and rascally, broken-down politicians," and "dishonest politicians bent on enriching themselves" are no longer standard descriptions applied to those Northern whites.

However, repeated use of "carpetbagger" in many new texts perpetuates the disparaging term and its negative implications about the individuals and the governments in which they served. "Carpetbagger" was an early version of "outside agitator" levelled by those seeking to discredit indigenous pressure for social change. New texts that use "carpetbag governments" and "carpetbag rule" to describe the Reconstruction governments promote the intended disparagement of the epithets. The terms are misleading descriptions of the governments. They reflect the notion that Black politicians were mere pawns of Northern whites. (Although texts use "carpetbagger" to refer to white Northerners, the term was also used to refer to Blacks who went South after the Civil War—some Northern-born, others returning to the area of their birth.)

Textbooks repeat discredited myths about Northern whites who participated in post-war Southern politics. For example, it is inaccurate to say they went South to help Blacks "exercise their newly acquired rights," to help "the Blacks register, vote and gain power," or "to get themselves elected to political office." Most Northern whites who participated in the Reconstruction governments arrived in the South well before 1867, when Congressional Reconstruction began. Ex-Confederates still ruled and Blacks had no vote and few rights. Thus, the notion that "carpetbaggers" went South intent on manipulating Black voters and getting themselves elected is a myth created by those who sought to discredit the governments.

Many of these Northern whites went South with the Union Army or the Freedmen's Bureau and decided to stay. Some were motivated by a desire to help create a more equitable society. Most, however, stayed in hopes of finding the same opportunities for economic betterment that have generated other migration from region to region, including the contemporary migration to the "Sunbelt." Richard Current writes that:

> No doubt there were political tramps who went South to make cynical use of the Negro vote and who contrived to win both office and illicit gain. But such men were few and comparatively unimportant. Far more numerous and more significant were those energetic and ambitious men who, with or without carpetbags, brought their savings or their borrowings to invest, who eventually got into politics for idealistic as well as selfish reasons, and who in office behaved no better and no worse than most of their contemporaries.

It is a distortion to state that "enough of [the Northern whites] were self-seeking to give the carpetbag governments a reputation for graft and inefficiency." The "reputation" had nothing to do with a particular propensity towards corruption among "carpetbaggers." Corruption was widespread in the post-war national government and in Northern state and local governments. Corruption continued in Southern governments after white supremacy was restored. Rather, the "reputation" developed because opponents of Reconstruction, particularly those who controlled Southern newspapers, blew whatever corruption did exist out of all proportion, in a concerted and ultimately successful campaign to destroy the credibility of the multiracial government. Allen Trelease, discussing the role of Southern newspapers, observes:

> The Democratic newspaper press—which far outstripped the Southern Republican press in numbers and circulation—played a vital role in stimulating and disseminating hatred of all things Radical. The wildest allegations and ad hominem arguments were at least half believed and unblushingly broadcast because they fit preconceived notions. Moreover, character assassination and slander were resorted to even when editors did not believe them, because they "served a good end" in discrediting the enemy (*White Terror*, pp. xxxv-xxxvi).

Achievements of the Reconstruction Governments

The period of carpetbag rule was not without achievement. The rights of women were increased, taxation was made fairer, and penal systems were reformed. Most of the new state constitutions made improvements in facilities for the care of the poor and the insane. Above all, they laid the foundations for public school systems. . . .

History of a Free People (1981), p. 370

Furthermore, the southern state governments accomplished a good deal during these years. They raised taxes in order to improve public education, which had been badly neglected before 1860. They also spent large sums on roads, bridges, railroads, and public buildings damaged during the war.

American History (1982), p. 504

Textbooks vary considerably in the extent to which they report the achievements of the Reconstruction governments. They often give greater emphasis to charges of corruption [see p. 25] than to the governments' achievements.

The most significant achievement was the extension of suffrage to Black and poor white men. Restrictions based on race, condition of servitude, wealth and property holdings were eliminated.

Concurrent with the extension of suffrage was the opportunity for Black and poor white men to participate in government. Their involvement in the constitutional conventions, legislatures and state and local offices provided the first opportunity for direct representation of their communities' interests in the political process. The state constitutions, and many of the new laws that were passed, were the most democratic the South had yet enjoyed. Many of these progressive features continued after the Reconstruction governments were destroyed.

Beyond the vote and representation in government, perhaps the greatest achievement was the establishment of free public school systems. The slavocracy governments had been interested in keeping taxes on planter wealth low, and ignorance among poor whites and Blacks high. The children of the wealthy elite received private tutoring or were sent away for formal education. Many of the Reconstruction governments also began, or expanded, assistance to higher education for both races.

Whether the new schools should be integrated was a matter of much debate. Generally the question was left unanswered in law, while separate schools were the practice. Louisiana, however, adopted "the most sweeping anti-segregation provisions ever enacted in the educational field in America," with the result that "a larger proportion of the school population—at least one-third—attended integrated schools in New Orleans between 1868 and 1877 than attend integrated schools in New York City and Chicago today (Bennett, *Black Power U.S.A.*, pp. 274-275)."

Voting by Black and poor white men was a significant advance of the Reconstruction period.

Another accomplishment of some Reconstruction governments was the repeal of earlier laws requiring racial discrimination. Herbert Aptheker reports the elimination of legal reflections of anti-Semitism as well (p. 566). In some states, laws *forbidding* discrimination were passed. Unfortunately, constitutional and legal guarantees of equality under the law, whether written into the U.S. Constitution or in federal, state or local civil rights laws, did not long survive the "redemption" of white supremacy.

While none of the Reconstruction governments extended the vote to women, many improved married women's rights to own property and to seek divorce. Mississippi enacted legislation requiring that married women who worked be paid their own wages directly and that, before selling a homestead, a husband had to obtain his wife's consent and signature. A number of the states passed laws to protect persons against property foreclosures or imprisonment for debt. Some states extended the power of local government, making it more responsive to those it served. Some states assessed taxes more equitably (the planter-dominated governments had established tax practices particularly beneficial to large property holders). The South Carolina legislature undertook a small-scale program of land redistribution.

Many Reconstruction governments adopted policies to improve the general social welfare. This represented a change in philosophy from the planter-dominated govern-

ments, which were more interested in planter welfare. New hospitals, orphanages, poor houses, asylums, and other such institutions were built and existing facilities enlarged. The governments sought to stimulate economic growth, particularly by aiding construction of railroads. They also built or repaired roads, bridges, levees and other public works damaged by the war. Discussing South Carolina, Bennett reports that:

> Instead of crumbling under black power, the state as a whole prospered. In fact, South Carolina produced a larger proportion of America's cotton during Reconstruction than before the war. During the Republican regime, there was a sharp rise in the production of wheat and corn and a firm foundation was laid for the important textile industry (*Black Power U.S.A.*, p. 191).

Charges of Corruption

> There is no doubt that graft and theft took place in the South during Reconstruction. The worst of the Reconstruction legislatures bought hams, perfume, champagne, and even coffins with public money. The public debt doubled and tripled in the Southern states. All of those things obviously were evils for which the Reconstruction governments were responsible.
>
> *America's Heritage* (1982), p. 311

> A black politician in Arkansas collected $9,000 for repairing a bridge that had cost the state only $500 to build in the first place.
>
> *American History* (1982), p. 504

> In South Carolina the leading lawmaker lost a thousand-dollar bet. Right away the lawmaking body voted to pay him back with state money.
>
> *The Free and the Brave* (1980), p. 458

New textbooks continue to emphasize charges of corruption in the Reconstruction governments, though the language is less overblown than that used in earlier texts ("an indescribable orgy of extravagance, fraud, and disgusting incompetence"; "the new governments . . . were shamefully corrupt and inefficient"). Some texts devote greater attention to corruption than to achievements of the governments (e.g., *American History* [1982] devotes 33 lines to corruption and 5 lines to accomplishments; *History of a Free People* devotes 48 lines to corruption and 8 to achievements). The last two quotes above repeat myths which have "enlivened thousands of history classrooms," yet have been demonstrated to be fallacious (see Bennett, *Black Power U.S.A.*, pp. 351-352).

Some texts attempt a balancing act, presenting assertions that corruption was almost inherent in the governments and then presenting other views which maintain that it was not. In so doing, an unfounded association between Reconstruction governments and corruption is planted in the minds of new generations of students. This is precisely the association that apologists for the white supremacist counter-revolution sought to establish.

Corruption did, of course, exist within the Reconstruction state governments and it is legitimate for textbooks to discuss it. However, such discussion is more appropriate within the section most texts have which presents the national phenomenon of political corruption at that time. Such a presentation would note rampant corruption from the administration of President Grant to the Tweed Ring in New York City (which likely stole more than all Southern politicians combined). Within this context, corruption and Reconstruction would not be seen as synonymous.

Within the discussion of Reconstruction, it would be appropriate for texts to mention that *charges* of widespread corruption and profiteering were levelled by opponents in an attempt to undermine support for Reconstruction governments. The presentation should note that profiteering and corruption varied from state to state; involved far more white than Black officials; was indulged in by Democrats, as well as Republicans; and continued in some of the white-only "redeemer" governments.

As for the increase in public debt, which one text labels obviously evil, discussion should be preceded with information about the unprecedented demands on state government spending. The Civil War left Southern roads, bridges, levees and other public works destroyed or in disrepair, and the necessary rebuilding was expensive. Establishing school systems where none had existed likewise increased public spending. Additionally, 4 million freedpeople, previously the responsibility of slavemasters, were suddenly added to the population for which government was responsible, requiring the construction or expansion of hospitals, asylums, jails and other public institutions. As elsewhere in the country, government bonds and spending were used to stimulate economic growth, especially the construction of railroads and other transportation. Such efforts were expensive. While not all debt so incurred was justified by the returns, the investments were—for the most part—sound and "decidedly enhanced the region's economic growth and prosperity (Trelease, *White Terror*, p. xxxii)."

Texts that suggest unfair tax increases on large property holdings should note that the owners of these properties had exercised almost total control of pre-Reconstruction governments and kept tax rates on their land far below its value. Some Reconstruction governments revised taxation to apply on a uniform basis to all property at its full value. Even with the increase, Southern tax levels remained considerably below those in the North.

Equal Rights for Women

South Carolina . . . enlarged women's rights . . . . the Fifteenth Amendment . . . guaranteed voting rights to people regardless "of race, color or previous condition of servitude" (although women of any color were excluded by common consent).

Let Freedom Ring (1980), p. 351

Textbooks occasionally mention that Reconstruction governments "expanded the rights of women," or did not extend the vote to women. But little historical context is provided that would enable students to understand the situation of woman's rights as it then existed.

Black and white women were the cutting edge of much of the anti-slavery movement. Women's involvement in the abolitionist movement required great courage and commitment, for it challenged rigid social proscriptions on women's behavior. The Grimké sisters, Angelina and Sarah, who grew up in a slaveholding family and became committed anti-slavery activists, created an uproar. "The spectacle of two women—and soon others—travelling from town to town to speak to mixed audiences provoked condemnation, especially from churches, that such actions were contrary to God's will and threatened the existence of the family (Robert Allen, p. 136)."

Male abolitionists urged the Grimké sisters to struggle on against slavery, but to remain silent about the even less popular issue of woman's rights. These men did not want to distract attention from the anti-slavery effort, or sully it by association with woman's rights. In 1837, Angelina Grimké reminded them of similar attacks "made upon Abolitionists, generally, when they were told a few years ago that they had no right to discuss the subject of slavery." No, she declared, we will not be silent on the denial of our rights, our equality, our humanity. "The time to assert a right is the time when that right is denied."

Activist women in the anti-slavery movement were in the leadership of the early woman's rights movement. In 1848, 300 women and men met in Seneca Falls, New York, at the first woman's rights convention. The convention unanimously demanded that women have the right to personal and religious freedom, equality in marriage, property ownership, education, employment, guardianship of children, control of their own wages, and equal pay for equal work. However, a resolution stating, "The sacred duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise," was adopted by only a slim majority. Elizabeth Cady Stanton had courageously pressed for the right of women to vote. The opposition was such that her husband, Henry Stanton, boycotted the convention and left town, calling the demand "outrageous." Even Lucretia Mott thought the move incautious. Nevertheless, Stanton persevered, encouraged by Frederick Douglass' strong support for women's right to suffrage. "Right is of no sex," Douglass had written in the initial issue of *North Star* in 1847. The only man at Seneca Falls to support the suffrage resolution, he persistently raised woman's rights in his work with Black and white abolitionists.

During the Civil War, many woman's rights activists worked to support the Union effort and for emancipation. However, in 1866, when the 14th Amendment was proposed in Congress, dissension developed. The Amendment required a reduction of Southern congressional representation if Black men were denied the vote. Southern Black communities were then experiencing an onslaught of white violence and virtual re-enslavement under the Black Codes. Since the Amendment offered hope that these communities could gain some desperately needed political power, many Black activists and their allies supported it. However, the Amendment explicitly limited suffrage to "males" (the first-ever use of "male" in the U.S. Constitution). Since it also counted women among of the population for representation, it directly challenged supporters of woman's suffrage.

The struggle over the 14th Amendment created a schism among those who had previously worked together for equal rights for African Americans and for all women. Frederick Douglass argued:

> I must say that I do not see how any one can pretend that there is the same urgency in giving the ballot to women as to the Negro. With us, the matter is a question of life and death, at least, in fifteen States of the Union. When women, because they are women, are hunted down through the cities of New York and New Orleans; when they are dragged from their houses and hung upon lamp-posts; when their children are torn from their arms, and their brains dashed out upon the pavement; when they are objects of insult and outrage at every turn; when they are in danger of having their homes burnt down over their heads; when their children are not allowed to enter schools; then they will have an urgency to obtain the ballot equal to our own.

Wasn't this all true, Douglass was asked, for the Black woman. "Yes, yes, yes," he responded, "it is true for the black woman, but not because she is a woman, but because she is black."

Some African Americans, such as Sojourner Truth and Robert Purvis, argued that the franchise should be granted without restrictions of race *or* sex. Purvis argued that he would rather his son were never enfranchised unless his daughter could be also, since she bore the double burden of being both Black and female. And, Sojourner Truth, constant in her vision that all barriers to human rights must fall, said:

> There is a great stir about colored men getting their rights, but not a word about the colored woman; and if colored men get their rights, but not colored women theirs, you see the colored men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as it was before. So I am for keeping the thing going while things are stirring; because if we wait till it is still, it will take a great while to get it going again.

Sojourner Truth (1797?-1883)

Lucy Stone (1818-1893)

At the 1869 meeting of the Equal Rights Association, Douglass proposed endorsement of the 15th Amendment. The Amendment was designed to protect the right to vote of Black men in the South, and to extend that right to Black men in Northern states where it was still denied them. The Amendment stated that U.S. citizens' right to vote could not be abridged by the U.S. or any state on the basis of "race, color or previous condition of servitude." Frances E.W. Harper, poet and Black anti-slavery lecturer, supported endorsement of the 15th Amendment, stating that ". . . when it was a question of race, she let the lesser question of sex go." Lucy Stone, a white feminist and anti-slavery activist argued that:

> . . . the entire war had been fought over the slavery issue and that only a small portion of the Congress and the general public sympathized with the cause of women's rights. It would be a dreadful mistake . . . to stubbornly demand a secondary goal—votes for women—and lose the principal objective—true freedom for the Negro (William Jay Jacobs, p. 119).

However, some leading white feminists opposed the Amendment because it did not address woman's suffrage. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, believing universal suffrage was the only just platform, left the Equal Rights Association to form a woman's suffrage association. Its aim was to adopt a 16th Amendment for woman's suffrage. Unfortunately, white supremacy emerged as a significant aspect of white women's struggle for the vote. Arguing that "degraded, oppressed" Black men "would be more despotic with the governing power than even our Saxon rulers are," Stanton stated that if "women are still to be represented by men, then I say let only the highest type of manhood stand at the helm."

Many white women struggling for the vote assumed with the end of slavery that Black men and women of all colors were equally oppressed. Some went on to argue that white women were qualitatively better potential voters than Black men. For example, Belle Kearney of Mississippi "won considerable acceptance for her contention that giving the vote to women while rigorously enforcing property and educational qualifications—would enfranchise millions of white women, thus preventing Negroes from destroying 'the holy of holies' of the Anglo-Saxon race (William Jay Jacobs, p. 123)."

Douglass, Truth and Harriet Tubman continued to share platforms with Stanton and Anthony, speaking in support of woman's suffrage. But much of the struggle for woman's rights, developed amid the anti-slavery effort by Black and white women and men, became submerged in the dominant and increasingly white supremacist society.

For many working and poor women of all groups, the ballot was a less immediate concern than improvement of working conditions. For Black washerwomen, who formed a labor organization in Jackson, Mississippi, in June 1866; for Black women who struck in rice and cotton fields; for white working women in the North who were organizing and striking for basic improvements in their lives and work; and for thousands of Southern white women, widowed by war and trying to rebuild war-shattered lives on their own; for all these women, the right to vote was less immediate and compelling an issue than it was for women in more comfortable economic circumstances. Sojourner Truth spoke of the need for equal pay for equal work:

> I have done a great deal of work, as much as a man, but did not get so much pay. I used to work in the field and bind grain, keeping up with the cradler; but men doing no more, got twice as much pay . . . . We do as much, we eat as much, we want as much.

The struggle to expand the rights of women—white and Black—continued in the South during Reconstruction. At the South Carolina Constitutional Convention in 1868, William J. Whipper, a Black delegate, moved to strike the word "male" from the election provisions. The Convention had already passed a law that would allow married women to keep their property and a law liberalizing divorce. Whipper stated:

> However frivolous you may think it is, I know the time will come when every man and woman in this country will have the right to vote. Is it right or just to deprive [them] of the privileges we enjoy? The time will come when you will have to meet this question. It will continue to be agitated until it must ultimately triumph.

There was no "second" for Whipper's motion and it was "decided in the negative."

In the spring of 1869, Louisa Rollin, a prominent Black woman from Charleston, addressed the House of Representatives in Columbia on the right of women to suffrage. Black state legislators in Georgia, who for a time were denied admission by white legislators, are credited with pressing female suffrage among other progressive measures once they were seated.

Women in the South—and all other states—did not win the vote during Reconstruction. Nevertheless, Black women played an important role in voting during Reconstruction. The wife of a white supremacist leader complained that Black women "are the head and fount of the opposition, some going to the polls to see that the men voted right."

Robert Smalls, five-term representative in Congress from South Carolina, urged Black women not to marry men who voted Democrat and to go to the polls with their husbands to make sure they voted Republican. Since Black men were often pressured by planters and other whites not to vote, or to vote Democrat, organizing Black women as a counter pressure made sense. *Harper's Magazine* reported that "when the men lose their work through their political affiliations, the women stand by them, and say, 'stand by your principles.'" Frances E.W. Harper wrote a poem portraying Black women's role in voting during Reconstruction. It said in part:

Deliverance

And if any man should ask me
If I would sell my vote,
I'd tell him I was not the one
To change and turn my coat. . . .

You'd laughed to seen Lucinda Grange
Upon her husband's track.
When he sold his vote for rations
She made him take 'em back.

Day after day did Milly Green
Just follow after Joe,
And told him if he voted wrong
To take his rags and go.

I think that Curnel Johnson said
His side had won the day,
Had not we women radicals
Just got right in the way. . . .

Bennett states that Black women "were everywhere the most vocal and aggressive champions of the Radical Republican regimes." He attributes this to the fact that wherever they could, Black families during Reconstruction opted for the women and children to be relieved from working in the fields (*Black Power U.S.A.*, p. 312). One observer wrote that the "Negro women are now almost wholly withdrawn from field labor [and the] children who were made available under slavery for industrial purposes are being more and more absorbed by the schools."

By 1920, when women finally won the right to vote, Southern Black men had been disfranchised, and most Southern Black women were denied the fruits of victory.

Yes, children, I am going to rouse the people on equality. I must sojourn once to the ballotbox before I die. I hear the ballotbox is a beautiful glass globe, so you can see all the votes as they go in. Now, the first time I vote I'll see if a woman's vote looks any different from the rest— if it makes any stir or commotion. If it don't inside, it need not outside. . . .

Sojourner Truth speaking to the children of Elizabeth Cady Stanton in 1867

Elections and Terrorism

. . . by 1877 the last of the Reconstruction governments had been voted out of office.

Freedom's Trail (1979), p. 338

In May 1872 Congress passed the Amnesty Act. It applied to about 160,000 former Confederates, all of whom could once again vote. . . . [By 1872] there was considerable opposition to the Klan's activities on the part of many white Southerners, and it gradually died out. Meanwhile, in one Southern state after another, reconstruction governments were replaced by governments that represented traditional white rule. This process was called "redemption."

The Americans (1982), p. 322

These secret organizations tried to frighten black southerners and their white sympathizers into staying out of politics. . . . The Force Acts, the withdrawal of many southerners from the secret societies, and finally the Amnesty Act virtually ended the power of the Ku Klux Klan and other such groups at that time. Most white southerners began to vote again, and white southern leadership reemerged. The reconstruction governments in several states were thus replaced by governments representing traditional white southern rule.

Rise of the American Nation (1982), pp. 399-400

U.S. history textbooks minimize the campaign of violence and terror white supremacists waged to gain their political "redemption." Many texts imply that white terrorism had little to do with the return to white-only rule. Instead, they suggest that this was achieved through the return of disfranchised white men to the ballot box.

White supremacist violence was particularly strong around election time, more so in areas where Black and white populations were about even. In Georgia, where Democrats and Republicans were evenly divided, terrorism yielded maximum results. "Georgia Democrats resorted to violence on a large scale [and] used every form of terrorism then known," winning every election after April 1868. "Local Republican leaders were shot down in broad daylight, and Negroes were mobbed or killed if they did not vote the right way. Election eve riots were a common occurrence (Trelease, *Reconstruction: The Great Experiment*, p. 176)." Columbia County, which had cast 1,222 Republican votes for Governor in April, 1868, recorded only one Republican vote for President seven months later.

As a result of Klan terror in North Carolina, 12,000 fewer Republicans voted in 1870 than previously, and Democrats retook the legislature. Robert Stiller describes events in North Carolina, as follows:

District attorneys, jury commissioners, sheriffs, many judges, and leading citizens of the community were mem-

bers or supporters of the Klan. It was a secret, highly organized, well-disciplined underground army. And it was determined to take control of the state out of the hands of Blacks, poor whites, and Republicans. . . .

The 1870 election was the Klan's target. On the night of February 26 they rode into Alamance and hanged Wyatt Outlaw, leader of the Republican party in the county. Outlaw was a black, a skilled mechanic, town commissioner, and leader of a local campaign to get a church and a school for the black community. They hanged him from an oak tree less than one hundred feet from [the] courthouse.

In Caswell County, the other Republican stronghold, the head of the party was a poor white man named John Stephens. Five men, all wealthy and educated, trapped him, strangled him, stabbed him, and threw his body on a woodpile.

The terror spread throughout the state during 1870. . . . By election day the work of the Klan had been done. Thousands of Republicans stayed away from the polls. The Democrats won the election and took control of the state legislature. One of the first laws they passed granted amnesty to anyone who had committed a crime on behalf of a secret white organization (pp. 38-39).

Ku Klux Klan terror declined after 1871. Texts often state that this resulted from federal prosecution after passage of the anti-Klan acts. Yet an important factor in the Klan's decline was the restoration of white supremacy in some states by that time. And though the organized Ku Klux Klan declined, white supremacist violence did not. What became known as "The Mississippi Plan" raised white violence to a level not previously experienced. The assertion above, that the decline of the Klan led to Reconstruction governments being replaced simply by the vote, is untrue.

Mississippi's infamous state election of 1875 is a case in point. It resulted in feats of voter turn-around similar to those achieved in Georgia. Yazoo County, which in 1873 had 2,500 Republican votes, had only seven in 1875. Such reversals resulted from the systematic application of economic pressure and terrorism.

Democrat clubs across Mississippi announced that any Black man voting Republican would find no employment in the state (lack of secret balloting made voter selection public). Poll watchers recorded how each Black man (and white) voted, and lists of those voting Republican were published. Those appearing on these "blacklists" were to be discharged and refused new employment. Blacks voting Democrat were recommended for employment. White doctors announced they would treat only Blacks who voted Democrat. White-controlled newspapers carried mastheads such as "A white man's government, by white men, for the benefit of white men" and called for carrying the election "peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must."

White military companies were formed and Democrat clubs armed themselves with repeating rifles. Little attempt was made to hide these activities, since publicity furthered their cause, and public drilling, parading and firing of cannon occurred. Republican meetings were forbidden or forcibly broken up. Black leaders were threatened with death and Black men were prevented from registering to vote. Labelled variously by historians as pogroms, massacres and riots, the slaughter of Blacks by armed white bands occurred throughout the state. Allen Trelease reports:

> In Yazoo County, a white Republican was killed, several Negroes were wounded, the sheriff was forced to flee, and armed whites took over, systematically killing Negro leaders in each division of the county. At Clinton, a white Republican and ten to thirty Negroes were killed, along with two Democrats. For four days following, whites combed the countryside killing Black leaders. . . . In many counties, the Republicans gave up campaigning. Negro officials were driven out, if not killed, and companies of armed whites assumed control (*Reconstruction: The Great Experiment*, p. 181).

When Governor Ames of Mississippi appealed to President Grant for troops to quell the bloodshed, Grant's Attorney General rejected the appeal. He stated, "The whole public are tired of these annual autumnal outbreaks in the South, and the great majority are ready to condemn any interference on the part of the government." Federal action against white terrorism had been lax, with only sporadic enforcement of the Anti-Klan Act finally passed by Congress in 1871. By 1873, Grant's administration had virtually ceased enforcement of the anti-Klan laws and had pardoned many already convicted under them. With growing pressure from within the Republican party, and by the Democrat majority that took control of the House of Representatives in 1874 (for the first time since before the Civil War), federal intervention in the South, particularly the use of troops, almost stopped. Grant's refusal to use troops to insure a free election in Mississippi signalled the collapse of Reconstruction.

On election day, armed whites seized the polls at Meridian and admitted Blacks only if accompanied by a white. Armed whites patrolled the roads around Aberdeen to prevent Blacks from reaching the ballot box. Terrorists fired into groups of Black voters in several counties. While Blacks in some areas did vote in large numbers, the Democrats won, 96,000 to 66,000, in a state with a majority of Black voters.

A Congressional committee investigated the Mississippi election, reporting that the state was "under the control of political organizations composed largely of armed men whose common purpose is to deprive Negroes of the free exercise of the right of suffrage and to establish and maintain the supremacy of the white-line Democracy." Despite its conclusion that the newly-elected legislature was therefore not a legal body, Congress let the white supremacist victory stand. And President Grant, who did so little to prevent the result, stated: "Mississippi is governed today by officials chosen through fraud and violence such as would scarcely be accredited to savages, much less to civilized and Christian people."

Black Resistance

When blacks would not give up their political rights, Klansmen burned their homes, beat them, and even murdered some of them.

The Free and the Brave (1980), p. 459

Textbooks largely ignore Black resistance to white violence. While the violence was ultimately overpowering, it is important for students to know that Black people did resist.

The resistance ranged from courageous individual acts to organized defensive militias. A Black woman, in North Carolina, used an ax to successfully defend herself against a Klansman attempting to break into her home. A group of Blacks near Stanford, Kentucky, repelled a Klan attack, killing three terrorists. Indeed, the "records are full of accounts of stubborn and armed resistance by the Negroes against all efforts to deprive them of the rights they had won (James Allen, p. 96)."

Citizen volunteer corps, with names such as "Wide-Awakers," were formed by Blacks before the Reconstruction governments came to power. Civilian military companies were established later to protect Black and white Republicans from violence. The *Alabama Beacon* reported, on September 18, 1869, that two companies of Blacks at Brewersville were drilling in readiness for expected raids by Klan terrorists.

Some Reconstruction governments authorized the formation of militia for protection against the white insurrectionaries. Governor Clayton of Arkansas organized a militia of Blacks and whites, imposed martial law, and crushed the terrorists by 1869. Numerous Black militia companies, with as many as 14 regiments of 1,000 men each, were authorized and armed by South Carolina's Governor before the election of 1870. That same year, militia in North Carolina, composed of Blacks and white mountaineers, arrested hundreds of Klansmen. Most were subsequently freed by white-controlled courts. In Black Belt areas of Alabama, Black militia companies were able to stem a reign of Klan terror in 1874, permitting the election of 35 Black Republicans to the Democrat-controlled legislature. But suppressing white violence with militia, particularly militia composed of armed Black men, was something Reconstruction officials too often hesitated to do.

Black resistance continued to the end. Reports from South Carolina, in 1876, speak of Black women "carrying axes or hatchets . . . their aprons or dresses half-concealing the weapons."

The white supremacist counter-revolution succeeded, not because Blacks did not resist, but because federal and state officials did not forcefully protect rule by law. Of the 20,000 federal troops stationed in the South, many were in Texas, assigned to border patrol and suppressing Indian resistance. As Reconstruction progressed, there was a continual decline in the U.S. troops stationed in the South, as many were re-assigned to subjugate Indian peoples. By 1875 when Grant refused the plea of Mississippi's Governor to send troops to quell spreading white violence, the federal government had thrown in the towel.

Racism in the North

Blacks had not been allowed to vote in parts of the South—despite the Radical governments there. For that reason . . . Congress passed . . . the Fifteenth Amendment.

The Free and the Brave (1980), p. 462

At first many northerners had championed the cause of the freed slaves . . . . northerners grew weary of the problems of black southerners and less willing to press for an effective program to help them learn their new roles as citizens.

Rise of the American Nation (1982), pp. 400-401

When Alexis de Tocqueville toured the United States in the 1830's, he observed that racial prejudice seemed stronger in the North than the South. Lydia Maria Child, a Northern white novelist active in the formation of the American Anti-Slavery Society, wrote an influential article on race relations in the 1830's titled "An Appeal for That Class of Americans Called Africans."

> While we bestow our earnest disapprobation on the system of slavery, let us not flatter ourselves that we are in reality any better than our brethren of the South . . . . Our prejudice against colored people is even more inveterate than it is at the South.

Racism and white domination were national in scope. Four Northern states—Indiana, Illinois, Iowa and Oregon—barred Black people from entering their territory. In much of the North, segregation prevailed in churches, courtrooms, theaters, schools, neighborhoods and public transportation. Black workers were mostly limited to menial jobs. William Wells Brown, a Black abolitionist, remarked: "To drive a carriage, carry a straw basket after the boss, and brush his boots, or saw wood and run errands, was as high as a colored man could aspire to."

Mob violence against anti-slavery speakers—Black and white, female and male—was a common occurrence. Elija P. Lovejoy, who published an anti-slavery newspaper in Illinois, was killed by a white mob. Northern mobs invaded schools, burned books, and ran teachers out of town for talking about abolition or for teaching Blacks. Prudence Crandall was subjected to official harassment and mob violence in Connecticut for opening a school for Black girls.

By 1860, there were 250,787 "free" Blacks in the South compared to 238,268 in the North. The tenuous position of

Breaking up of an Abolitionist meeting in Michigan by pro-slavery forces.

Northern Blacks was highlighted during the 1863 draft riots in New York City. Congress had passed the first federal draft in U.S. history, allowing wealthy men to avoid service by paying $300 or providing a substitute. Lincoln had issued his Emancipation Proclamation earlier that year. Employers had been using Black workers as strikebreakers, particularly against the predominantly Irish longshoremen. When mobs of poor whites, heavily Irish and with longshoremen in the vanguard, ransacked New York for three days, their anger and violence focused on Blacks. Untold numbers of African Americans were beaten to death, lynched, and wounded. A Black orphan asylum was burned to the ground. Many of New York's Black citizens fled the city until the mob was brought under control.

> The rioting spread to other cities—Newark, New Jersey; Troy, New York; Hartford, Indiana; Port Washington, Wisconsin—and into the mining districts of Pennsylvania. Everywhere Negroes were attacked, their homes sacked and burned, and thousands made homeless. Many Blacks were driven out of jobs, despite years of service in a number of cases, and employers, fearing attacks by mobs, simply refused to employ Negroes in any kind of work (Philip Foner, p. 14).

After the war, when the Reconstruction Act of 1867 extended suffrage to Black men in the South, most Northern states still denied Black men the vote. When Congress enacted the 15th Amendment, in 1868, only Minnesota, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Nevada allowed Black men suffrage.

The pervasive racism and white, Anglo-Saxon chauvinism that prevailed by the late 1800's in national media, academe, and government, were not Southern in derivation. Rather, they developed out of national, social, economic and political conditions. Indeed, the intransigence of racism and white domination nationally, highlights the progress wrought in the South during Reconstruction.

The Failures of Reconstruction: Placing the Blame

> **The Civil War. . . . left a legacy of hatred and racial injustice that has not disappeared. . . . The nation's wounds took so long to heal because of what happened during the twelve years after Lincoln's death. This period is called Reconstruction. . . . In this effort, the American people entered another tragic period.**
>
> *The Americans* (1982), p. 310

> **. . . other problems needed to be solved: what to do about the tariff, how to improve the methods of appointing certain officials, and how to regulate the railroads. The whole country would have to think about the problems. It would have to forget about the differences of the past and turn to the future. In order to take care of these new problems, northerners began to forget about blacks and what was needed to make sure that they had equal rights.**
>
> *The Free and the Brave* (1980), p. 462

Reconstruction lasted barely a decade. In that brief and imperfect time, the United States came closer to realizing democracy than ever before. Yet textbooks tend to depict Reconstruction as a tragedy. Rarely do they grieve the tragic failure to overcome white supremacy and transform the nation into one where all people, regardless of color, could equally share the "blessings of liberty."

Textbooks, for the most part, simply ignore the failure to create a multi-racial, democratic society during Reconstruction. Instead, they focus on celebrating the reuniting of North and South. That the reunited nation became a for-whites-only society, contradicting its own democratic principles, warrants little attention. Rather, texts suggest that democracy flourished after Reconstruction, glossing over the fact that this "democracy" excluded and oppressed citizens of African descent—not to mention Asian, Mexican and indigenous Americans.

When textbooks raise race in terms of the failure of Reconstruction, they tend to do it in ways that suggest that people of African descent were unprepared to assume citizenship responsibilities. One text cites a need for "an effective program to help ["black Southerners"] learn their new roles as citizens (*Rise of the American Nation*, p. 401)." Another asks students to consider what "would have been the elements of program that would have prepared ["Southern Negroes"] for equal status (*History of a Free People*, p. 381)?" Thus, Black people are presented as "the problem" to be treated, rather than those who prevented them from enjoying equal rights.

Depiction of Black people as unskilled and helpless, omission of their efforts to attain justice and a fair share of political power, and misrepresentation of the capabilities of Black politicians are related examples of victim-blaming discussed

earlier. Implying the inherent deficiencies of African Americans is far more typical of U.S. history texts than is admitting that constitutional government had failed as a means by which U.S. citizens of African descent could attain their full rights and proportionate share of democratic political power and governmental leadership.

When addressing the failure of Reconstruction, textbooks sometimes assert that the "Radical Republicans" were at fault. One text faults the "Radicals" for "two serious mistakes"—thinking that Blacks could protect themselves with just the vote and failing to provide land so that freedpeople could gain economic independence. Yet this text earlier noted that Congressional Reconstruction sent 20,000 troops "to keep law and order" in the South—an indication that lawmakers, including "Radicals," recognized that the vote alone was insufficient. Moreover, the text claimed land redistribution failed because "moderate Republicans considered private property a basic American right. It could not be taken away from its owners without due process of law (*The Americans*, p. 318)." The text thus contradicts both of its reasons for blaming the "Radicals."

Another text claims that "Radical reconstruction was of only temporary help to the Negroes whose rights it professed to defend" because "Radicals took no long-range steps to provide what the freed people needed most—education and the opportunity to acquire land (*History of a Free People*, p. 374)." That the more numerous "non-Radicals" in Congress or white supremacists in the South might bear responsibility for such failures seems to have eluded the writers of this text.

Reconstruction's failure, according to *History of a Free People*, included the "Solid South . . . a reflection of the bitterness created by Radical reconstruction." Southern whites, the text states, agreed with author Joel Chandler Harris' assessment of Reconstruction as "a policy of lawlessness, under the forms of law, of disenfranchisement, robbery, oppression and fraud (p. 374)." Another text concurs: the "Radical plan of reconstruction had not been successful. In fact, it had created nearly as much hatred and bad feelings as the Civil War itself (*The Free and the Brave*, p. 463)." Reconstruction's bitter legacy is thus blamed on those who sought to expand democracy and civil rights, with little attention paid to those who mounted the violent counter-revolution.

Sharing responsibility in textbooks with the "Radicals" for the failure of Reconstruction are "Northerners" generally. Almost every text examined had some variation of the following:

> Many northerners began to say that perhaps the freed slaves *did* need the supervision of white southern leaders. Perhaps it would be better, they now said, to let southerners work out their own problems of government and race relations. Northerners justified their retreat by referring to the Constitution, which left many powers in the hands of the states. (*Rise of the American Nation*, p. 401).
>
> To most northerners, prosperity seemed more important than the rights of black people. And many believed that the nation could not be prosperous until white Southerners once again controlled their state governments. (*The Free and the Brave*, p. 465).
>
> . . . the white citizens of the North turned their backs on the black citizens of the South (*American History*, 1982, p. 512).
>
> Outside the South, the idea grew that, having achieved freedom, blacks should now take care of themselves. Northerners were weary of the seemingly endless troubles in the South. (*The Americans*, p. 322).

White citizens generally, North and South, did share responsibility for the re-establishment of white supremacy. However, textbooks play fast and loose with notions of what "most Northerners" were thinking or how that accounted for events.

In a society based on law, governmental institutions are responsible for guaranteeing equal justice for all. The views or attitudes of a minority or a majority concerning the rights of other citizens, *should be* irrelevant. The institutions are responsible for enforcing the law. However, the white-dominated judicial, legislative and executive branches of national, state and local governments for the most part actively or passively condoned the "redemption" of white supremacy in the South and its continuation nationally. Yet, except for an occasional reference to the Supreme Court's 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision, governmental responsibility for the betrayal of democracy is not discussed in most texts. Instead, "Northern whites" take the rap.

Two texts mention that "Northerners" lost interest in maintaining military control of the South (*American History*, 1982, p. 509; *Let Freedom Ring*, p. 355). No doubt many did, for any number of reasons. But some whites had special interests at stake and considerably more influence than others in affecting national policy. The fact that large numbers of troops were removed from the South and sent to conquer Indian nations in the West (e.g., the Lakota [Sioux] in 1876; the Nez Perce in 1877), served Northern railroad and mining interests more than it did average "Northerners." The use of ten thousand U.S. troops to violently suppress a massive strike wave of Northern workers in 1877, suggests there may have been differing views among "Northerners" about the removal of troops from the South and their subsequent use elsewhere.

A 1982 text which offers most of the preceding explanations for "Northern" indifference and reaction concludes:

> . . . many northerners now found it easier to concentrate on strengthening national unity and to give less attention to the rights of black Americans. This attitude was shared by a growing number of northern businesses. It was clear that a disorganized, poverty-stricken South was not good for business on either side of the Mason-Dixon line (*Rise of the American Nation*, p. 410).

It is instructive to compare the same passage from the 1972 edition of this textbook:

> . . . many northerners now found it easier to concentrate on strengthening national unity and to give less attention to the place of black Americans in national life. This decision was stimulated by a growing number of northern businessmen who wanted to stop the Radical program of reconstruction. A disorganized, poverty-stricken South . . . (p. 417).

Was giving "less attention to the place [or rights] of black Americans in national life" "stimulated by" [original passage] or merely "shared" by [revised passage] northern businesses? Northern business interests enjoyed considerably more influence over the Republican Party than did "northerners" generally. And government actions were considerably more in line with the interests of business than of workers. The harsh and brutal federal treatment of Northern strikers contrasts sharply with the leniency shown toward Southern white insurrectionists.

Another text similarly states that, "Northern business interests wanted stability in the South," without noting that so did most everyone, including African Americans. Yet the text goes on to explain that stability "usually meant having traditional white leadership in government (*The Americans*, p. 322)." The text fails to note that "traditional white leadership" was responsible for creating the violence and instability in its effort to regain *total* control of government.

Textbooks generally present the Compromise of 1877 (allowing Hayes to assume the Presidency in return for the removal of the last U.S. troops from the South), as the end of Reconstruction. Little discussion is provided of its impact on the effort to create a more democratic society. One text states:

> The significance of the Compromise of 1877 was not simply that a threat of civil war had been averted, nor that the Republicans managed to stay in power by abandoning Radical reconstruction. The Compromise was also a temporary alliance between the conservative property interests of the North and South (*History of a Free People*, p. 374).

A political cartoonist's depiction of Rutherford B. Hayes' role in the Compromise of 1877.

Moreover, the Compromise of 1877 "differed from previous arrangements such as the Missouri Compromise and the Compromise of 1850 in that it was largely secret and was not embodied in law (p. 374)." Yet *History of a Free People* fails to mention that each "arrangement" involved unity between various white interests in the North and in the South at the expense of Black people's rights and the nation's principles. Instead, the Compromise is credited with bringing the collapse of "carpetbag governments" and an end to "Radical reconstruction."

Since most texts have posed the major problem of Reconstruction as restoring the South to the Union, they celebrate the reuniting of "North" and "South" (read "white North" and "white South"), all but forgetting the citizens at whose expense white unity was achieved. Instead, Jefferson Davis is quoted approvingly, telling "southern students" that:

> The past is dead; before you lies the future, a future of golden promise, a future of expanding national glory . . . lay aside all rancor, all bitter sectional feelings, and . . . make your place in the ranks of those who will bring a consummation devoutly to be wished—a reunited country (*History of a Free People*, p. 376).

A number of texts state that with the ending of Reconstruction, "Southern whites [sometimes just "Southerners"] regain control of *their* state governments [emphasis added]." The repeated use of the possessive "their" suggests the governments rightfully belonged to only whites to begin with. *The New Exploring American History* says whites "set out to win back their places in the state governments (p. 333)," suggesting "their places" had been usurped by Blacks. What was lost was the *total* control of government by that aristocracy of white men that had traditionally ruled. Poor white men gained a voice in government for the first time, and most white men who had previously voted continued to do so. The textbooks' presentation of control of government is clarified by an observation of Vincent Harding:

> . . . any move by black men and women to define their freedom as the act of sharing power was perceived as a total threat to the power of whites. Of course what the black movement really represented was a threat to total white power, which was not the same . . . . members of the planter-entrepreneur classes were always ready to force the issue of black power or white power as the only real question at hand (*There Is a River*, pp. 311-312).

"'Conservatives' gained control of one southern state after another until by 1876 only South Carolina, Florida and Louisiana had not been restored to 'home rule' (*History of a Free People*, p. 373)." The issue, as Allen Trelease notes, was not home rule but who should rule at home. Textbooks, for the most part, ignore this, while repeating the euphemism of "home rule."

The promise of Reconstruction failed because most of white society never intended to keep it. Reconstruction was indeed an "accidental revolution set in motion by the war" and by African Americans' courageous efforts "to legitimize, protect and develop it (Harding, *The Other American Revolution*, p. 73)." For a brief period, the potential existed to transform the nation and to create, in the midst of the "new birth of freedom," a government that was closer to being of, by and for the people. But powerful white forces in the South, where most African Americans lived, had no intention of passively accepting the loss of their total power (and the privilege it entailed) by sharing power with those they had so recently dominated. Rather, they sought to retain their economic control of Black people's labor and to regain their exclusive political power by denying Black people political representation. And their resolve was strengthened by the vacillation and timidity of those in the national government. Powerful segments of Northern white society had little desire to have African Americans participate in a central, self-determining role in the nation's political, economic or social life.

"Reconstruction in the South required reconstruction in the nation where blacks were concerned, and the nation did not want it (Harding, *The Other American Revolution*, p. 76)." The resulting betrayal of democracy represented a tragedy not only for African Americans but for the United States and what it proclaimed itself to be. That is the real failure of Reconstruction, which U.S. history textbooks do so little to explain and so much to whitewash.

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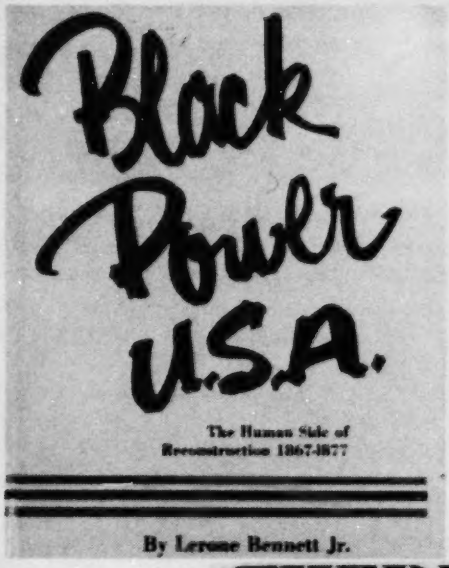

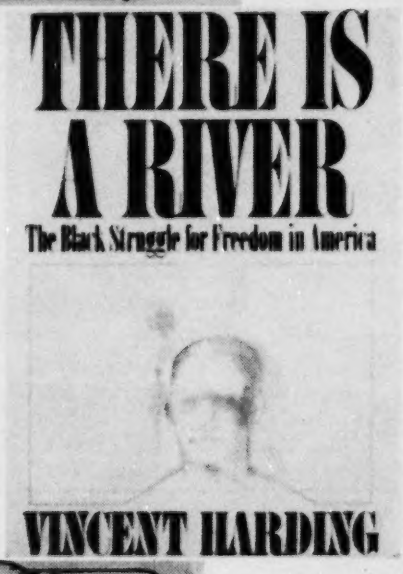

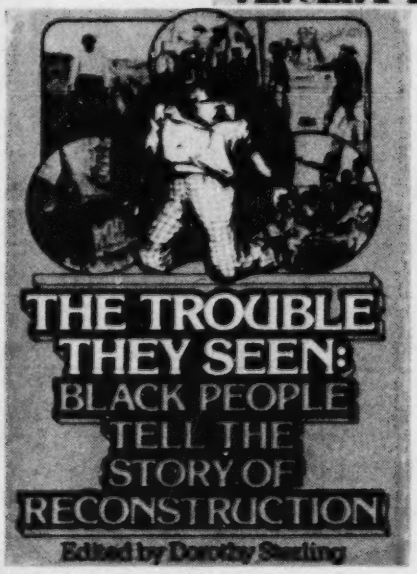

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Some Events of the Reconstruction Era

1865

The war ends and Lincoln is assassinated.

All-white Southern legislatures pass Black Codes.

Congress passes Thirteenth Amendment and establishes Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands.

Thirteenth Amendment ratified.

General Sherman issues Special Field Order No. 15, setting aside land for freedpeople.

Conventions of African Americans held in Nashville, Raleigh and Charleston.

Mississippi and Florida enact laws segregating public transportation.

Wisconsin, Connecticut and Minnesota deny Black men suffrage.

Fifty-eight ex-Confederate officials and generals, elected to Congress under Johnson's reconstruction plan, are denied seating.

1866

Fourteenth Amendment passes Congress.

Over Johnson's vetoes, Congress extends the Freedmen's Bureau and enacts the Civil Rights Bill, conferring citizenship to Blacks and nullifying the Black Codes.

Led by policemen, whites riot in Memphis, killing 48 Blacks and 2 whites, burning 90 homes, 12 schools and 4 churches.

White riot in New Orleans leaves 35 Blacks dead.

Two Black men elected to the Massachusetts legislature, the first to serve in any Northern state.

Tennessee readmitted.

Nebraska and Tennessee confine suffrage to white men.

Equal Rights Association founded, with Elizabeth Cady Stanton as president, Frederick Douglass as vice-president and Susan B. Anthony as secretary.

1867

Congress passes the first and second Reconstruction Acts over Johnson's vetoes.

Iowa and Dakota grant suffrage to Black men; Ohio rejects it.

Ku Klux Klan holds first convention in Nashville's newest hotel, selecting Nathan Bedford Forrest, an ex- Confederate general, as leader.

Registration of 700,000 Black men and 625,000 to 660,00 white men as voters in the South.

Constitutional Conventions open in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Virginia.

7,000 Chinese railroad workers strike the Central Pacific for a 10 hour day, higher wages and an end to whipping of workers.

1868

Constitutional Conventions open in Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Texas.

Fourteenth Amendment ratified.

Congress overrides Johnson's veto of bill granting suffrage to Black men in Washington, D.C.

2,000 persons killed or wounded in Louisiana prior to November elections. Massacres of Blacks occur across the state.

Congressional Committee on Lawlessness and Violence reports that since 1866, 373 Blacks are known to have been killed by whites and 10 whites killed by Blacks.

Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina and South Carolina readmitted.

Whites in Georgia's government eject Black members of the legislature. Congress returns state to military rule.

Minnesota, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Nevada permit Black men to vote. Black suffrage defeated in Missouri and Michigan.

African Americans being shot down by white mob in Memphis, Tennessee on the morning of May 2, 1866.

House impeaches President Johnson. Senate fails to find him guilty.

Working Women's Association formed by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton "to act for its members, in the same manner as the associations of working men now regulate the wages, etc., of those belonging to them."

Congress of the National Labor Union admits four women delegates and elects Kate Mullaney second vice-president, the first woman chosen by a national labor union for a top position.

The Great Lakota (Sioux) Nation and the U.S. sign the Ft. Laramie Treaty after repeated setbacks caused the U.S. to sue for peace. The treaty acknowledged Lakota sovereignty and committed the U.S. to keeping its nationals out of Lakota territory.

Black Kettle's village of Northern Cheyenne is attacked by troops led by General Custer and 103 children, women and men are killed without mercy. Four years earlier Black Kettle's camp at Sand Creek was attacked and 123 people, including 98 women and children, were massacred.

1869

Congress passes the Fifteenth Amendment.

Democrats regain control of Tennessee.

The Colored National Labor Union, the first national organization of Black people in the post-war period, is organized, with several women delegates attending. Mary A.S. Carey elected to the executive committee. Discussions focus on questions of land and equal rights, though a resolution of sympathy for the Cuban independence struggle from Spain is passed.

The National Labor Union congress seats nine Black delegates, the first to take part in a nation-wide labor assembly. The congress resolves that "the National Labor Union knows no North, no South, no East, no West, neither color nor sex in the question of the rights of labor."

Women shoeworkers form the first national union of female workers, the Daughters of St. Crispin.

Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton form the National Woman's Suffrage Association after leaving the Equal Rights Association in order to concentrate on woman's issues. Lucy Stone and Julia Ward Howe form the American Woman's Suffrage Association, focusing primarily on the issue of suffrage.

First Japanese settlers arrive in California.

First transcontinental railroad completed. An estimated 1,200 Chinese workers died while building the Western portion.

1870

Fifteenth Amendment ratified.

J.H. Rainey from South Carolina becomes the first Black man in the House of Representatives, while H.R. Revels becomes the first Black Senator.

Congress passes the Ku Klux Klan Act (Enforcement Act of 1870), empowering the Army to maintain order in federal elections.

Texas, Virginia, Georgia and Mississippi readmitted.

Democrats regain control of North Carolina and Virginia.

4,880,009 African Americans are 12.7 percent of U.S. population.

Chinese workers brought to Mississippi as sharecroppers to threaten Black labor and hold it "in line." 75 Chinese workers brought from west coast to North Adams, Massachusetts to break a strike at the Model Shoe Factory.

U.S. troops massacre 174 Piegan Blackfeet children, women and men.

Women in Wyoming territory gain right to vote and serve on juries. Utah territorial legislature votes to enfranchise women.

1871

Ku Klux Klan Act (Third Enforcement Act) passes, permitting President to suspend *habeas corpus*.

Democrats regain control of Georgia.

Virginia reapportions election districts to minimize Black vote.

20,000 workers march in New York City demanding an eight-hour day. Organized by the International Workingmen's Union, the march included Black members of a waiters' union and Black plasterers.

U.S. Indian Commissioner Francis C. Walker comments: "When dealing with savage men, as with savage beasts, no question of national honor can arise. Whether to fight, to run away, or to employ a ruse, is solely a question of expediency."

Congress passes the Indian Appropriations Act, unilaterally declaring Indian nations no longer "acknowledged or recognized as an independent nation, tribe or power with whom the United States may contract by treaty. . ." However, since 372 legally ratified treaties already exist (acknowledged by the Supreme Court as "the supreme law of the land"), Congress recognizes that "no obligation of any treaty lawfully made and ratified with any such Indian nation or tribe prior to March 3, 1871 shall be hereby invalidated or impaired."

Anti-Chinese riots break out in Los Angeles and other cities.

1872

Congress passes Amnesty Act, pardoning most ex-Confederate officials ineligible to vote or hold office under 14th Amendment.

Freedmen's Bureau ceases activity.

Georgia institutes school segregation.

North Carolina passes law granting amnesty for any crimes committed on behalf of a secret white organization.

Lieutenant Governor P.B.S. Pinchback of Louisiana becomes the first Black Governor, assuming the office after the impeachment of Governor Warmoth. Pinchback served for 36 days.

1873

Supreme Court, in *Slaughter-House Cases*, dilutes protection of 14th Amendment for African Americans.

Financial panic and depression sweeps the country, the most serious economic catastrophe until the great depression of the 1930's. The depression would last through 1877.

1874

Democrats regain control of Alabama, Arkansas and Texas.

Economic depression, mass unrest among farmers and workers, Republican corruption in Washington, and counter-revolutionary gains in the South cause Republicans to lose control of the House of Representatives for the first time since 1861.

Women's Christian Temperance Union established, quickly becoming the largest women's organization of the time.

White cigar-makers adopt the made-by-white-labor cigar label in their effort to drive Chinese labor out of the industry.

General Custer leads an army reconnaissance mission into the sacred Black Hills of the Lakota Nation and reports evidence of gold, setting off an invasion of U.S. nationals into Lakota land.

1875

Congress passes Civil Rights Bill prohibiting discrimination in such public accommodations as theaters, hotels and amusement parks.

Democrats gain control of Mississippi.

Boston's Chinatown begins as Chinese workers are brought from California to break a European immigrant shoeworkers strike.

1876

Supreme Court, in *Cruikshank and U.S. v. Reese*, weakens federal protection of voting rights.

Military forces of the Lakota Nation defeat an invading U.S. force led by General Custer, temporarily maintaining Lakota sovereignty and the national borders the U.S. had sworn in 1868 to uphold. Later in the year, U.S. forces over-run the Lakota nation.

San Francisco requires Chinese men arrested to have their queue (pigtail) cut off.

Celebrations mark the 100th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

1877

Rutherford B. Hayes promises to withdraw federal troops from South and gains enough votes to win the Presidency.

Democrats regain control of South Carolina, Florida, Louisiana.

Supreme Court in *Hall v. De Cuir* rules that a state may *not prohibit* segregation in a "common carrier." In *Greed v. State of Alabama*, the Court upholds law *against* intermarriage.

A series of strikes culminate in a nation-wide railroad strike. Before being violently crushed by U.S. troops, 100,000 workers walk out and all major cities are involved.

General Oliver Otis Howard (former head of the Freedmen's Bureau) orders the Nez Perce out of the Wallowa Valley area of the Northwest, where they had lived for generations and which President Grant affirmed to be theirs in 1873. After months of skillful fighting and evasion while trying to flee to Canada, Chief Joseph and his people are finally forced to surrender.

U.S. troops move the Poncas to "Indian Territory," resulting in many deaths during the forced march.

Almost one thousand Northern Cheyenne surrender at Ft. Robinson in Nebraska after being promised a reservation on their lands. Instead, they are forced marched for seventy days to "Indian Territory." After a year in exile, Little Wolf led them on a 1,500 mile trek back to their lands, arriving in 1879.

Almost one year after the forces he led defeated the invading U.S. Seventh Calvary at Little Big Horn, Crazy Horse is murdered while in U.S. custody at Ft. Robinson in Nebraska.

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Perception vs. Reality

A 1979 *Newsweek* poll found 30 percent of whites believing Blacks were "moving too fast," 42 percent believing Blacks were "moving about right," and 15 percent believing Blacks were "moving too slow." Keeping in mind that Blacks are about 12 percent of the population (all minorities about 18%), compare these perceptions with the following selected statistics:*

Medium income of Black families (1981) was 57% that of white families, compared to 56% in 1953.

50% of white families and 24% of Black families were **"middle class"** in 1979, compared to 47% and 24% in 1970.

Those **living below the poverty level** in 1980 included 10.2% of whites, 32.5% of Blacks and 25.7% of Latinos.

Poor white families declined by 2% between 1969-1979, while poor Black families increased by 22%.

In 1979, 1 out of 12 white males was in a **service job**, compared to 1 out of 5 females and 1 out of 4 minorities. On the other hand, 1 out of 3 white males held **professional/managerial positions**, compared to 1 out of 4 females and 1 out of 6 minorities.

The **proportion of minorities in professional jobs** was 5% in 1981, about the same in 1970, and 3% in 1960.

Black businesses were 3.3% of all U.S. businesses in 1977, up from 2.4% in 1972. **Black-owned businesses** accounted for two-tenths of 1% of the GNP in 1977.

Median income in 1980 was $15,117 for white men, $8,983 for Black men, $5,819 for white women and $5,114 for Black women.

The **median income** of Black men with 4 years of college ($15,643) in 1980 was only slightly higher than that of white men with only 4 years of high school ($15,176). White men with 4 years of college had median income of $22,724.

Unemployment rates as of March 1983: whites 9%, Blacks 19.9%. For white youth 21.4%, for Black youth 43.5%.

About the same proportion of Blacks with 4 or more years of college were **unemployed** in 1980 as were whites with only 8 years of school or less.

1979—Blacks face 37% greater chance of **occupational injury** and 20% greater change of **death** from those injuries because of placement in more dangerous jobs.

Life expectancy at birth in 1980 was 70.2 years for white males, 77.8 for white females, 65.0 for Black males, 73.6 for Black females.

Infant mortality rate in 1978 was 12% for whites, 24.5% for Blacks.

1978—42% of minority children **born into poverty.**

1977—32.7% of Black children suffer from **malnutrition deficiencies,** compared to 14.6% of white children.

1981—Blacks are a third of those receiving food stamps, Medicaid, and public housing and a half getting Aid to Families with Dependent Children, all programs sharply reduced by recent **budget cuts.** Blacks are underrepresented among those receiving Social Security retirement benefits (8%), Medicare (9%), and veterans compensation and pensions (9%), all part of the "social safety net" spared large budget cuts.

Blacks were 1% of all **elected officials** in 1981. In the South, where Blacks are 22% of the population, 2.5% of all elected officials were Black, 7% of state legislators.

Blacks in the **armed forces** were 21.2% of enlisted personnel in 1979. 4.7% of officers were Black.

About 45% of victims of **police killings** are minorities.

Of **prisoners executed** under civil authority from 1930 to 1981, 2,066 were Black compared to 1,754 whites. Few or no whites have ever been executed for killing a Black person.

1979—minorities are 24% of all **students**, 13% of all **teachers**, 10% of **elementary principals** and 4% of **secondary principals.**

1978—60% of minority students were enrolled in predominantly minority or **racially isolated schools.**

1981—75% of whites, 56% of Blacks and 54% of Latinos **graduate from high school.**

1979—4.1% of whites and 7.1% of Blacks 5-13 years old were **behind grade level.** 8.9% of whites and 16.6% of Blacks 14-17 years old were **behind grade level.**

Percent of Blacks under 35 **enrolled in higher education** went down from 10.8% in 1977 to 9.9% in 1980.

Of Blacks in higher education in 1978, 41.9% were in **two- rather than four-year degree programs**, compared to 34% of whites.

Percent of **Ph.D.'s granted Blacks** rose from 2.7% in 1973, to 4.6% in 1977, and fell to 3.5% by 1980.

Percent of **Blacks enrolled in medical schools** fell from 6.3% in 1974 to 5.7% in 1979.

Minority college faculty went from 2.2% in 1968 to 4.4% in 1977.

*Statistics from *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1982-1983* and from *Fact Sheets on Institutional Racism*, available from CIBC Resource Center, 1841 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10023.

The Declaration of Independence
July 4, 1776

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. . . .